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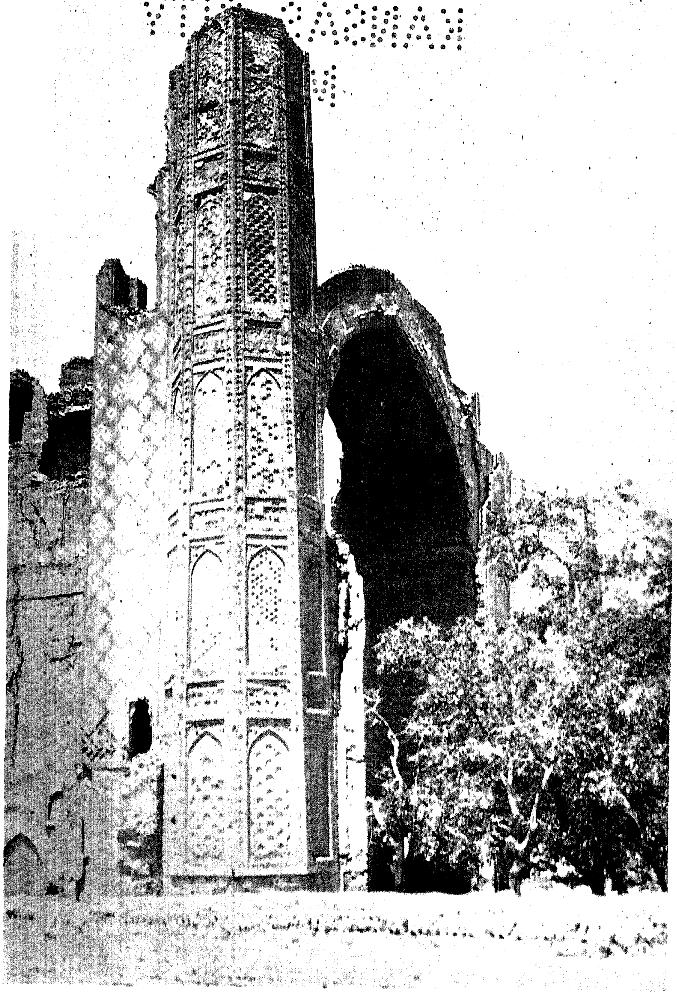
SHIRT-TAIL AND PIGTAIL



The Mosque of Bibi-Khanum, Samarkand

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SHIRT-TAIL AND PIGTAIL

Nonchalant Adventures in Central Asia

BY
HENRY ALFRED SCHROEDER
AND
LAURANCE ARMISTEAD PETERS

MINTON, BALCH & COMPANY
NEW YORK 1930

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TO

CARL TILDEN KELLER
Whose interest, optimism, and unfounded enthusiasm
forced this book to begin,

AND TO

PROFESSOR JOHN M. BERDAN
Whose cynicism, sarcasm, and brutal criticism
drove it to a finish,

THIS OPUS IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

TO
THE ANXIOUS MEMORIES
OF THOSE FAMILIES WHO
LIKE OUR OWN
SAT BY FIRESIDES AND WORRIED
WHILE ERRANT OFFSPRING ROAMED THE WORLD
WE CHEERFULLY OFFER
THIS WHITE PAGE
AND
A MOMENT OF SILENCE

FOREWORD

It was the middle of June and I was sitting rather gloomily in my office. Those who have wandered around the world are peculiarly susceptible to these gloomy moments. We can not always be footloose, and at the most inopportune moment something or other intrudes itself upon us to bring forth the insistent call of the Road, and makes our immediate surroundings appear drab and undesirable.

Oddly enough the friends and acquaintances who drift through from odd corners of the earth do not usually have the effect of intensifying this desire to get away; often they allay it by giving it a chance for ventilation.

On this particular occasion a card was brought in introducing two Yale alumni of a few days' standing, with the remark that they were planning to leave immediately for Central Asia.

As the authors say, their knowledge of the country they proposed to cross was of a somewhat sketchy nature. From an intensive study of the atlas they had come to the conclusion that they would go to Constantinople and then through Russian Turkestan to Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan. Crossing the Tien Shan ranges they would head over the desert to Peking.

There was an Elizabethan spaciousness in these plans that was refreshing. It was obvious that neither of the potential travellers was indulging in braggadocio, nor were they of the "Smart Aleck-Far Cathay-Wanderlust" type. They were two young fellows who wanted to travel unescorted by Cook. They would not cause the American Eagle to flap his wings, and then when untoward consequences arose, fling their temporarily chastened persons into the arms of some harassed American consul.

Indeed they seemed admirably adapted to face the vicissitudes of travel far from the signposts of the beaten track, with limited finances, and limited linguistic accomplishments. They were ready for the right sort of adventure, and the genuine romance that can be found only by its votaries who have within them the qualities that can call it forth and appreciate its presence.

The volume for which they have asked me to write these few words is to my way of thinking proof conclusive that I was correct in my conjectures. The incidents are accurately recounted, although many of the names are of necessity fictitious. Every page is thoroughly readable, and the exuberance of youth is sufficiently tactfully directed, to avoid seeming a weariness of the flesh to the more mature or wayworn readers.

KERMIT ROOSEVELT

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SHIRT-TAIL AND PIGTAIL

SHIRT-TAIL AND PIGTAIL

CHAPTER ONE

A COUPLE O' LUNATICS

"Bat*oom*, Tif*leesi*, Ba*koo*;
Kara*snov*odski;
Mairrf, Bukhar-ra-a-a-a, Samar-r*kand*;
Ko*kand*, Andi*zhan*, p'tom O-o-osh;
I-i-i-i Kash*gar*!"

THE jolly-faced Persian grinned, took a deep breath, and began the recitativo:

"Two noble youths from America are they.
A land of milk and honey gave them birth;
A land of riches greater than the wealth of Islam,
And of fair-haired maidens more beautiful than the virgins
of Kashmir;
Where gold and jewels pave the streets:
For such is America who fostered them.

"They left their glorious land at their backs,
And turned their faces Eastward;
Perhaps lured by tales of the East,
Or anxious to try the strength of their youth.

"Over the Seven Seas,
Over the Seven Hills,
Across the Twelve Major Rivers of the world
They have come.
Hard has been their road
And difficult their way;
And yet they have hardly begun their journey.

"Their road lies treacherous before them;
They travel a way which mortals dare not:
Their glorious danger-beset path is strewn with trouble.
The very winds bear evil,
And Death there rides his black camel.

"May Allah the One God—praised be His ninety-nine blessed names—
May Mohammed, His Prophet,
From His Seven-Stepped Throne of Glory,
May the Fourteen Greater Apostles—let them be exalted—
And the forty-seven minor saints—on whom Peace—
Bless and preserve them with constant care.

"Dost thou know their way? Do ye know their road?
This is their route:

CHORUS

"Bat*oom*, Tif*leesi*, Ba*koo*;
Kara*snov*odski;
Mairrf, Bukhar-ra-a-a-a, Samar-r*kand*;
Ko*kand*, Andiz*han*, p'tom O-o-osh;
I-i-i-i Kash*gar*!"

The fat Persian grinned again, dismissed his crowd of listeners with a shrug, and turned to the objects of his eulogy. Standing stiffly at attention, he saluted, hand upraised, in a combination of Fascist, Mussulman, and traffic policeman. Settling his flat-topped skullcap firmly upon his head, he rubbed the side of his magnificent hooked nose, and waited.

He was the first passenger we had met when we boarded the little Italian motor-ship at Constantinople. As he was of the East, the real East, which we had come to visit, we were drawn to him at once. In the matter of language there was nothing in common except a very little Russian, but names are the same in any language. When he discovered that we were bound for Kashgar, his eyes glinted, and he began to repeat the names of the cities along our route. This, as is the way of the East, grew to be a song, which he infallibly chanted whenever he saw us approach.

As the freighter chugged up the Bosporus toward the Black Sea and Russia, he pointed out the sights: mosques, palaces, and huge country estates set along the water's edge. As we slipped by a glittering, jewel-box mosque, whose graceful lines seemed to rise from the swift water, a little white launch came between us and the shore, struggling against the current. The jolly old Persian mumbling names and places was forgotten. We leaned against the rail and watched. On the stern of that launch the American flag fluttered in the cool Eastern breeze.

We waved to the Ambassador, lumps in our throats. It was the last good-by to home and friends. Before us lay Russia, Turkestan, China, all the places in the Persian's chant, with Kashgar our goal. The future held nothing for us but the Unknown. We had set out on this trip to Kashgar without the slightest knowledge of how to get there, and we were now jumping off into blankness.

KASHGAR! Eight months before, we had heard it first, heard it and been captured by its spell. Kashgar! The clear call of the muezzin swells like a bell over an Eastern city, warning the Faithful to prayer. . . . Tall minarets flank the smooth domes of mosques, dazzling with purple and gold. . . . Slim, dark-eyed maidens in whispering silken garments slip through the bazaars; through bazaars filled with rare silks and ivory, with sapphires and priceless rubies. . . . Grand Khans in black armor ride proud their splendid stallions. . . . Flashing dancers whirl madly in courtyards to strange melodies, their raven locks crowned with amber-scented red garlands. . . . Tall mullahs robed in sweeping scarlet stalk through the crowded streets. . . . Endless lines of camels plod painfully over trackless deserts, casting grotesque shadows in the setting sun, bringing the wealth of the Orient for the pleasure of a Sultan. . . . The warm desert breeze bears rose-scented incense; weird music floats through the languid air; over all is the mysterious subtlety of the East, vague, alluring, compelling.

Kashgar! The sensuous call in that music tempted, seduced, and bound us to follow. Can we be blamed for thrilling with adventure and romance? Kashgar! The East, the savage, inscrutable Orient, spoke to us, and we left home, friends, families, and a summer on the idle beach. Eight months before, it had come, back in drab little New Haven, and coming, had devoted us to its pursuit. We were forced to follow a will-o'-the-wisp.

Pete was sitting sprawled on a couch in his college room, his huge hand wrapped around a glass of gin and ginger-ale. Pete, or Mr. Laurance A. Peters, of Seattle, was six feet two and red-headed. At this moment his two hundred pounds of brawn were making the faded sofa bulge to the floor. Pete was no beauty, but his disposition was of the best, and his blue eyes were kind and easygoing.

He took a sip from his glass and looked through the window. The moon was rising behind Harkness Tower, surrounding its noble lines with a graceful halo. The cold, clear air of November filtered into the warm, shaded room through the half-opened leaded panes. It was a night made for romance. Pete sighed softly.

The other occupant of the room sat crouched on the arm of a chair, swinging his legs. He too held a glass, half empty. He looked at Pete. "What's the matter with you?"

He was rather short and almost chunky, although at the moment his precarious position on the chair made him seem stooped. His large blue eyes, usually alive with fun, were now drowsy. He was no beauty either, for his shoulders sloped too low, his legs were short, his body square, and his head was crowned with wiry brown hair. He seemed to be a fairly good-natured person, not a bad sort in a way. He was known to the post office as Henry A. Schroeder, of New York.

Pete removed his bulk carefully from the battered sofa, and walked to the window. "Oh, I don't know. I guess I'm sort of fed up. I feel like going places and doing things."

"We could tear down to Callahan's?"

"No, I don't mean that. I mean real places."

"Well," said Harry, wiping his mouth. "You have the whole world and there's a map of it on the wall."

"I mean it. Next summer. I want to go where people don't usually go. Some place away from everywhere."

"That's the first decent suggestion you've made tonight. I haven't anything to do this summer. Let's go to Europe."

Pete's forehead wrinkled into a frown above his large Roman nose. "Naw, I've been there."

"Here's the map." Harry became eager. His eyes twinkled with excitement. "West? No, you live there. North?"

"Costs too much for equipment. Besides, I don't like the cold."

"We can't go South. I've been as far as the Argentine."

"East!" We said it together.

We found New York on the map and followed its latitude across the globe. Spain, Italy, Turkey, Persia—India!

Our fingers wavered for a moment about India. Suddenly Pete whispered "Kashgar!"

It lies in the western part of Chinese Turkestan, northwest of India. A huge parabola of mountain ranges is spread on the center of Asia, the point to the westward. The sides stretch almost to the Pacific, in the north and south. Himalayas, Karakorum, and the Pamirs cut off the great plateau in the center from Afghanistan, India, and Burma; Tien Shan, the Celestial Mountains, form the boundary of Siberia to the north. In the middle of the parabola's apex is a city, Kashgar.

The sides are closed to the east by two deserts, the Takla Makan, and the trackless Gobi. Tibet lies south of these deserts. Therefore Kashgar is in a natural oasis in the very center of Asia, surrounded by some of the tallest mountain ranges in the world, and by two deserts. We saw it in that natural cup, fortified by a ring of barriers, and to us it seemed to be the one place in the world where

Cook's Tours and sightseers had not penetrated. "Let's go there!" Our minds were already made up.

Harry followed what seemed the easiest route back. Russian Turkestan, Samarkand, Bokhara, Merv: what names! The Caspian, the Caucasus, Tiflis, the Black Sea, Constantinople. It was settled. There was nothing more to do.

Harry lit a cigarette and beamed. His drink stood forgotten on the floor. But a discomfiting thought struck him and he frowned. "Say, Pete, I've only got five hundred dollars in the world. We can't do it on that."

"Why not?" Pete asked seriously. "I think I can raise five hundred on my car; a thousand between us ought to do it."

"I guess so. We can always bum. But if you don't sell your car, we'll be out of luck."

With the object of getting letters to impress the Reds we interviewed a number of people. All listened kindly, smiled, and humored us.

A noted Asiatic explorer spent two hours trying to dissuade us. "You will get in there, not know the language, and be held up for months. You have not nearly enough time, nor have you one-tenth of the money necessary. I predict that you will get no further than the Caspian."

We told a college professor about it. At first he did not know where Kashgar is. When we explained: "What an idiotic idea! Curiously enough, you astound me with your ignorance. You mean to tell me you do not *know* what you are getting into? I think"—he puffed on his pipe—"I think"—puff—"that you"—puff, puff—"are" —puff—"a couple o' lunatics!"

A business man who seemed to know told us that it was impossible to get into Russia. That was a new idea. We followed it up. Eleven people who had been in Russia filled us with wild tales of spies, jails, and police, and stated that the Soviets would certainly not allow us to enter. "Can't we pose as a scientific expedition?" "Bunk! They're nobody's fools."

At last we met William J. Morden, the head of a recent expedition into Central Asia for the American Museum of Natural History. "We have a thousand dollars (if Pete sells his car), health, good legs, and a lot of ambition. What do you think of our going to Kashgar?"

"Fine!" Mr. Morden said strenuously. "Nothing easier. Simple as a trip to Boston. Better get permission now from the Bolos." (He had been to Kashgar.) "Give my regards to the old Governor there."

We wrote for Soviet visas, enclosing a sheaf of impressive-looking documents. We collected letters from all the well-known men we knew or some one else knew. We engaged a steerage passage for Constantinople at the enormous cost of a hundred dollars, and then Pete sold his car.

There were no plans. We thought that a railroad ran from the Caspian, east into Turkestan, but no one knew how far it went or whether it was still in commission. The only thought was to progress eastward, always eastward, until Kashgar appeared. We sailed from New York in the middle of June without knowing whether or not our Russian visas had been granted.

There was no more baggage than we could comfortably carry. Most of the weight was taken up by medicine, knives, scissors, cheap flashlights and cigar lighters for the "natives," probably for barter. There was a nice collection of seamen's discharge papers, old passports, fishing licenses, and letters. In addition, we had procured a letter from the Chinese Consul in Chinese, an assorted dozen engraved tailor bills, and a few seals from candy boxes. Incidentally our families had come across quite handsomely, and we were well provided with liqueur money on the boat.

The Orient has nothing to offer the steerage of a French ship in the matter of discomfort. Sign on the "dining saloon": FIRST SITTING, PORTUGUESE. SECOND SEATS, GREEKS, SYRIANS, AND OTHERS. Inside the saloon: soup, stew, and a handful of nuts; or sometimes stew, soup, and the nuts. We didn't mind the cockroaches in our cabin; they ran fast and stayed in hiding in the baggage; but the constant stalking and hunting of the elusive inhabitants of our bunks was wearing.

The third day was Harry's birthday, and Pete was supposed to graduate from college. So the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition "crashed" first class, collected twenty jovial companions, reserved the first-class Saloon for the night, invited the purser, and gave the best champagne party that the old boat had ever seen. Sailors still talk of it in Marseilles. After that, the boat was ours. When we finally left at Constantinople, the barman, our dear, dear friend Antonin, became tight for the first time in eleven years, and wept bitterly to see us go. Needless to say we and our twenty companions were not encouraged by the two Bible tours on board. In fact, the reputation of Oklahoma Gertie, who was fat and forty, was completely ruined because she was seen by some of her Biblical Brethren in our company.

We learned very little on that trip to Constantinople.

The Azores were beautiful, but European. The beer was bad.

Lisbon was more European, but the Moorish castles around the city were interesting, if you like castles. The beer was much better, and you can buy three-star cognac for seventy-five cents a bottle.

Athens, with her history and her architecture, was hot, dusty, and yellow. The stones of the Acropolis had a half-chewed look, and *they* were yellow. The city was filled with fish markets and shoe-shine boys.

Salonique was messy and half built. The only object of interest seemed to be a white tower; just why it was interesting we never discovered. But you can get very good beer near it.

"We'll get some of the real East to-morrow," said Harry, as the ship entered the Dardanelles. "Istamboul! Shall we get our Soviet visas? That's what's worrying me. Wouldn't it be hell to have to stop right here?"

"Oh, if we don't get 'em we can go to Africa."

"Well, I'm worried. Let's go up to Antonin." That noble soul, believing that our long faces were for the girls who had left us at Athens, was ready with an old French proverb: "All breaks up, grows calm, and passes when one trusts in veeskee-sodah." It helped to drum up trade.

In the end there was nothing to it. We disembarked at Constantinople, interviewed a number of people to whom we had introductions, and found them no different from New York. "You can't get into the Soviet Union," they said. "What a crazy idea!" The Ambassador told us very kindly that the United States would not be responsible. But we fearfully presented ourselves at the Soviet Consulate and asked for the Consul.

"Yes, Mr. Weinstein himself. Of course not, this is a personal matter. Strictly private and not for secretaries."

A charming Jewish gentleman received us in his private office. We chatted for a time in English. He read our letters. Then he looked in a file, stared at us for a moment, and told us that we could go to Kashgar.

"I cannot give you more than a transit visa for Turkestan, because that country is military territory. I can only give you a visa directly through to the Chinese border on the road to Kashgar. You will not be allowed to stop in the Union more than is necessary for travel."

"How about our getting back into Russia from Kashgar?" Harry cautiously put in.

"That," he said with a smile, "is none of my business."

We walked out of his office toward Russia. "How about it, Pete? No stops. A one-way ticket into the heart of Asia and no way to get back to Russia. O.K.?"

"Sure," said Pete. "The boat leaves in two days. Let's get our passages."

"We can't help it if we *miss* a train or two, can we?"

The passages were "booked" and we wandered about to see the sights.

Somehow when one thinks of Constantinople one thinks in terms of mosques and minarets, of exotic streets filled with baggy-trousered fez-wearing Turks, of silk-clad women veiled mysteriously, followed by faithful slaves. One imagines that here is the East, the fierce, impenetrable Orient. Visions of dirty, bearded mullahs squatting in dingy doorways sucking the long tubes of bubbly hookahs, and of proud Sultans riding forth from marble palaces to lead armies numberless as the sands of the desert in defense of the Faith, come to one's mind for no good reason.

Unfortunately Constantinople is only a rather large, very dirty, European seaport, with trolley-cars, taxicabs, and gasoline stations. The houses are ordinary houses, the bridges are modern steel and stone structures, the harbor is filled with lighters, launches, and ultramodern ferry-boats. Only occasional minarets rising from clusters of domes remind one that here is the threshold of the East.

And yet there is a beauty of setting about the place all its own, a beauty bound up with the sea. The seven high-crowned hills of the town look down upon the Golden Horn, which thrusts converging banks to the very doors of the houses. That long delicate finger of land, covered with cool, green groves, winds about the harbor. If you wish to walk beneath those bleak, cypress-rimmed mountains opposite, you must first cross the glittering Bosporus. If you go to Stamboul, the Old City, you must pass over the Golden Horn by one of its many bridges. The sea seeks the depths of the city and weds itself to the very heart of Istamboul.

To find a remnant of the Turkey of the imagination you must pass over the Golden Horn, once the anchorage of a thousand sail of the line, to Stamboul, the Turkish section. There are the mosques and the bazaars; there narrow filthy streets wind among themselves in a way equaled only by Boston's north side. Fat, paunchy beys spread their hulks in the cool doorways, smoking quietly. Dark-eyed women slip through the crowds in the bazaars, fingering wares. Beggars reach suppliant arms to indifferent passers. And it is said that in the night thieves skulk, hand on wicked knife, to watch for unwary passers. But progress has reached even here. The fat Turks are dressed in approved European styles, and smoke cigarettes, not hookahs; the women wear the latest from Paris and walk the streets with bold uncovered faces, no longer furtive-eyed; while the bazaars offer to the view not the expected priceless gems, rare silken garments, or exotic curios, but pots and kettles, dirty food, cheap high-heeled shoes, phonographs, and cloth printed in Jersey City.

The reason for all this disillusioning progress is to be found in a gentleman by the name of Mustapha Kemal Pasha. He is the cause of everything new. He calls himself the Ghazi, which is Turkish for Boss. Whoever has fault to find, let him tell it to the Ghazi—and then to the judge.

If women wear Paris styles and leave off the yasmak—blame the Ghazi. If men wear straw hats instead of fezzes—blame the Ghazi. If Oriental bazaars sell chintz from Fall River—tell it to the Ghazi. Only don't say anything out loud, for, like Mussolini, he is the Boss, and his word is the Law of the Medes and the Persians.

He has developed a new policy of "Turkey for Turks." He believes in Nationalism but, strange to say, he seems to be spending most of his time finding out what other nations are doing and making the Turks copy them. In other words, the East is slowly retreating before the advancing phalanx of Western civilization, and disappointed visitors regret it.

For one thing the freedom and superiority of the male has been hampered. When old Abdullah became bored with the nagging of his better halves, he used to call them into his private office. "Thou art divorced!" he would remark casually. "Thou art divorced. Go into the Serail and get your things. The train leaves at six-fifteen. James will take you all to the station in the new Camel. Go, you're all divorced!" He would grin sardonically and curl his mustaches, for his word, thrice repeated, was law. But now the West and the Ghazi have put a stop to man's comforts. They have brought alimony, lawsuits, private detectives, and scandal sheets. No longer can a man have wives. Now he has a wife. The Terrible Turk has a Terrible Turkess at home, who can nag him with no fear of being sent back to mother. As he is eternally on the wagon, he cannot even look to the juice of the grape for consolation; the joyful triumvirate of wine, women, and song has been reduced to a rather gloomy solo. Of course this doesn't affect the Ghazi much; he is a grass widower, but his concubines have never submitted to a census.

From the Turk's point of view he hasn't done so badly. His country is fast disappearing as an Oriental museum piece, at which Western travelers can stare for a moment and then return to subways and steam heat with a sigh of relief. The day is not far distant when the rich Turkish stockbroker will take a Cook's tour of the East, to look with wonder at the queer Oriental dress and exotic customs of Persia and Syria.

There are still a few things left—the mosques for example. Pete had a sudden thought, no rare occurrence with him. "Listen, Harry. If we're going into the country of Mohammed it might be a good idea to get at least a speaking acquaintance with Allah. Let's go to mosque."

"O.K. It might come in handy. But do they have mosque on Monday?"

"Sure, they have it every day. We'll just wander around Stamboul and dive in the first one we see."

"But we're infidels. Will they let us in the place?"

"Who's they?" Pete settled it.

The first mosque we saw was on a hilltop, and the way to it led through a maze of streets, all going nowhere. We kept the six minarets in sight and arrived after a hot walk. Six minarets! It was the only one with six. "Must rate pretty well with Allah," Harry remarked.

In the courtyard we moved slowly, watching the line of people going in. Everyone knelt before a line of water faucets, washed his hands and face. When we had mastered the technique, we joined the line and performed ablutions, right hand, left hand, face. The management forgot to provide soap, so the toilet was a bit perfunctory. Each one then took off his shoes. We followed. Soon we were wriggling our toes in the cool rugs and salaaming to Allah with the best of them. It was hard to tell when to salaam, but by watching out of the corners of our eyes we usually managed to beat the others to it. The weird monotonous chanting of the priest on the dais, and the strange gilt and red ornaments in the huge hall filled us with a queer emotion, which was heightened by the colors in the light filtering through gorgeous stained-glass windows set high in the walls. We were forced to leave when the prostrations became too frantic; we were afraid of a severe faux pas. Disillusionment number seventeen: the mosque was lighted by electricity. The Ghazi's fault?

We thought we had said good-by to the old Ghazi when we boarded Motor-Vessel *Caldea* for Russia the following afternoon. But he managed to pop up several times during the next few days.

We leaned over the stern and watched the shores of the Bosporus go by in lofty cliffs and green-topped hills, until the Black Sea opened before us. Old Shaikh el Jabal, the Persian, waddled up. We offered him a cigarette just to see his refusal: a love-sick tenor attitude with hand over heart to thank us, and a woebegone shake of the head accompanied by a slow rubbing of fat stomach to mean it would make him sick. He chatted for a moment, and managed to tell us that he had four wives and eighteen children in Tabriz, and that he was a chief in his own right. Some of his deck passenger friends began to gather. His eye lighted. He saluted, and began verse two:

"Batoum, emerald on the shores of the Dark Sea, where raven-haired maidens sport on the sands,
Tiflis, jewel of Kafkaz, Queen of glistening snow-topped Georgia,
Baku, Prince of Oil, whose heart smells with the smell of smoke,

"Krasnovodsk, yellow dust on blue water, where engines puff to the desert,

"O Merv, thou pearl of Kara-Kum, once home of the Kings of Iran.
Bokhara, high, holy, divinely descended, whose straight walls are the strength of Islam,
Samarkand, the ancient; green-curled city of Timur Khan—may Allah send him the delights of paradise—a glittering gem on the face of this earth,

"Kokand, garden of high Asia, whose pomegranates are as large as my two fists,
Andijan, the empearled, home of Khans and grower of cotton,
Osh, mythical city of Suleiman, who dares to tempt thy mountains?

"And—and—the unknown, the untrodden, the home of fabulous wealth and yellow men in pigtails, the Sixth City of Asia, the goal of intrepid men,
Kash*gar*!!!

"These are my eleven cities, eleven gems in Asia's diadem—
And I, Shaikh el Jabal, sing this song:

"B'*toom*, Tif*leesi*, B'*koo*;
Karas*nov*'dski;
Mairrf, Bukhar-ra-a-a-a, Samar-r*kand*;
Ko*kand*, Andi*zhan*, p'tom O-o-osh;
I-i-i-i-i [pause, climax] KASHGA-A-A-AR!" [Salute.]

CHAPTER TWO

BETWEEN THE DUCE AND THE GHAZI

WHEN a country is governed by a dictator its inhabitants are deprived of pleasure. It is harder on tourists and foreigners. Rules and regulations confront them at every corner. They are always in fear of the police.

Even at sea the power of dictators was held over our heads. Mussolini owned the boat, and you did what he said. He had posted with his own hand a long list of Fascist rules of conduct in the saloon. The wayward passenger in search of enjoyment was threatened with fiendish punishments.

There we were, between the Duce and the Ghazi. On the high seas, where the Ghazi had no jurisdiction, the Duce stepped into his large shoes. If we wished to go ashore, up popped the Ghazi. For us there would be no relief. At the end of our voyage, when the Duce and the Ghazi were gone, their place would be taken by a greater boss than either of them, the People. In Russia the long arm of the People is felt through an organization much more dreaded than police. You whisper its name—the Cheka!—and you automatically shudder.

However the Duce did little more than prevent our smoking in the dining saloon. It was this Turkish Boss who tried to hinder us from the benefits of our trip by keeping us from Samsoun. In common with the reader we had never heard of Samsoun, had never hoped to hear of it, and would never have known whether it was a kind of fish or a species of dubious Turkish dessert if we had not stopped there. When we arose in the morning, and found the ship at anchor in a slight bend of the Black Sea coast which might go by the name of a harbor, our curiosity was aroused. "What's this place?" we asked, in the manner of a sleepless traveler in a Pullman car demanding the name of the station from the porter.

"This is Samsoun," the steward told us. At least he must have used those words.

"Samsoun? What, not *the* Samsoun? Not the famous Samsoun where the Sarts massacred the Tuaregs? Surely, not *the* Samsoun?"

"The same!"

"What difference does it make?" Harry wanted to know. And it didn't make the slightest, until we saw the little old-world town, with its red-tile roofs, whitewashed houses, and tiny, muddy streets, set like a jewel in green rolling hills. The evident charm of the place was not to be resisted. "I'm going ashore!" we said together, and piled ourselves into a launch. Mustapha Kemal Pasha thought differently.

One of his least intelligent minions met the launch at the dock, and told us where not to get off. "But no, you cannot land. No English are allowed here," said this Son of the Prophet, holding the passports upside down and studying them intently.

We were at a loss. What could we do against the Ghazi? But just then a young Swede, who comprised the other third of the male passenger list, stepped up and laid into the soldier in Turkish. "We are not English, thou daughter of Mohammed. We are German, and we are going to land. Wouldst thou detain those who gave their lives for such as thee?"

We caught the hint. Harry burst out, "Sure, ich bin Deutsch. Nicht wahr? Wie viele koste? Ach so-o-o-o-o!" The prophet's granddaughter hitched his sword and saluted. We passed down the street sputtering "Ach so!" and wondering what would happen if any of these Turks spoke German.

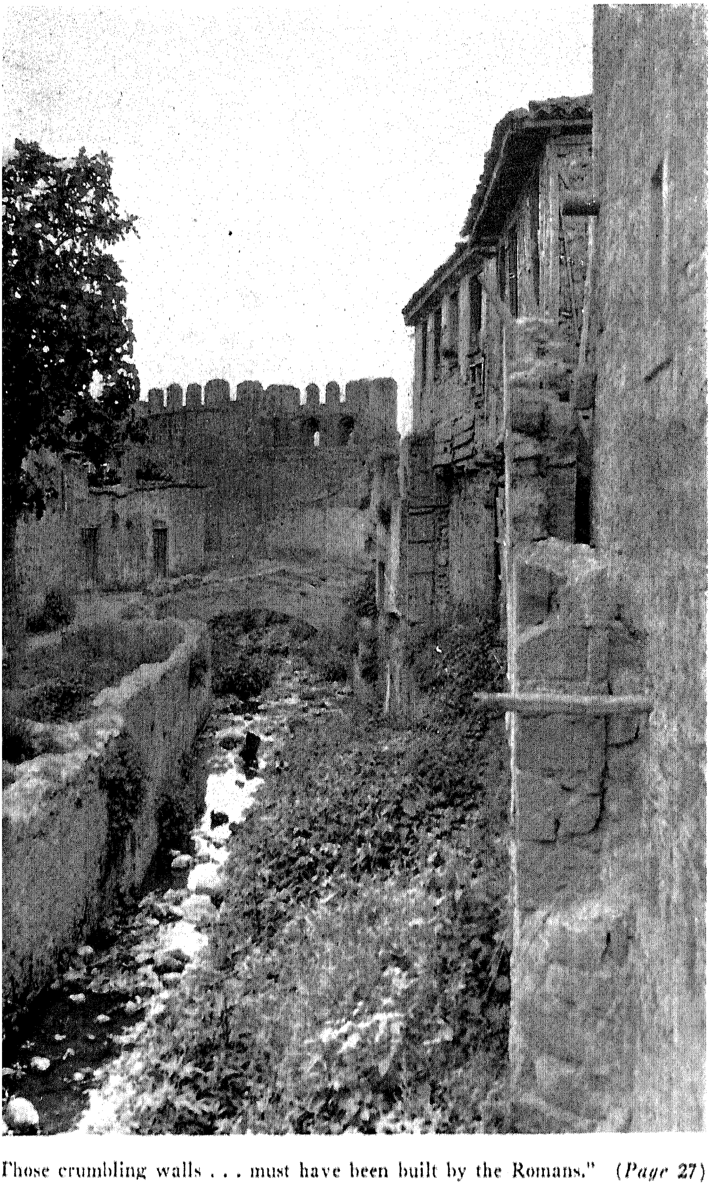
Our faith from then on lay in Paul Mohn, the young Swede. For some reason which we never discovered he was traveling on a special mission to Afghanistan for his government. Why should Sweden be interested in Afghanistan, of all places—any more than Afghanistan should be interested in Sweden? However, there is no accounting for tastes, and the Swedes remain as a great pioneer race. But we were interested in Kashgar!

Nor was the spirit of Lief the Lucky lacking in his descendant. Paul had been seven years in Turkey during the crucial period after the war, and he knew his Turk, as he had just proven. We held an official meeting of the Board of Directors of the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition then and there, and unanimously elected him to honorary membership, as linguist, general information man, and situation-fixer. The neophyte was an engaging fellow totally lacking in the fear of God, who showed signs of even raising the high ideals of this great organization.

Paul at once justified his election by leading us to the office of the Swedish Consul, a charming gentleman

"Bat*oom*, Tif*leesi*, Ba*koo*—"

"Ancient ox-carts bring the dried tobacco from the fields."



Those crumbling walls . . . must have been built by the Romans." (*Page 27*) named Haussmann Bey. A Swedish Consulate! Mr. Haussmann also ran a tobacco factory on the side.

The finest cigarette tobacco in the world is grown here, grown among the green hills behind the town, picked over, leaf by leaf, by natives in the little barns, and packed for shipment in bales by hand. Women, squat, unhealthy, greasy, shuffle the brown leaves one by one, working for two or three weeks to finish a single bale, while their babies, who will grow up to follow their mothers, sprawl about playing with scraps and leavings. Ancient oxcarts bring the dried tobacco from the fields, where it has been cultivated with old-fashioned tools and the slow, painful exactness of hand labor. Laborers look forward to the excitement of a new crop, pickers celebrate the gala event of another bale to pick. Time means nothing, man-power is cheap, and the march of the world is of no consequence.

But Progress has introduced one form of amusement, the automobile. We were taken for a long ride in the back country, over beautiful hills and through endless fields of waving tobacco, only to be stopped short by the failure of Progress to provide anything more than a ditch for a road. We tried the seacoast and drove high over the brilliant blue of the Black Sea for a mile or so, until the road suddenly ended in a raging torrent. Apparently no one ever went further. And the reason for the end of the trail lay in the little cluster of houses way down by the shore.

This was the swellest roadhouse on the Turkish coast, Mr. Haussmann told us. It had an open-air dining room, a set of modern bath houses, and whisky sodas to order.

There the gay youth of the seashore sped in high-powered roadsters during the romantic summer evenings, to make much whoopee. If the younger generation is on the road to Hades—do the Moslems have a Hades?—he is having a very pleasant time doing it in that setting.

Speaking of dining rooms, back in the "Consulate Tobacco Factory" we were getting very hungry. Mr. Haussmann was pouring out his soul in fervent French on the tobacco business, while we were attempting to turn the conversation to food. "There are seven grades of Samsoun tobacco, all used for making cigarettes," said the Consul.

"Does Samsoun tobacco make a good after-dinner smoke?" asked Pete, trying to look interested.

"Each leaf must be examined at least three times before we let it go out," explained the merchant, waxing warmer to his subject.

"Is food very expensive in Samsoun?" Harry demanded, leaving tact for blunter methods.

"Samsoun tobacco is so expensive that only a small fraction of it goes into the best Turkish cigarettes," adroitly riposted the bey.

"What is the custom here? At what hour do you dine?" Paul thrust, standing firmly by his brethren in the attack.

Even Paul, the diplomat and linguist, was about to give up, when our host suddenly finished with tobacco and surrendered. "You must be getting hungry?" The answer was obvious. "Shall we have some lunch?"

There was wild applause. What mattered new sights when the belly called? But his Turkish meal almost finished us. Innumerable strange, evil-looking dishes ended in a grand finale with muddy coffee and a dessert composed of alternate layers of wrapping paper and parchment on a base of cardboard, all covered by a sweet sauce.

The bey walked with us down to the bay in search of a swim. Along the shore lay numbers of queer craft, with high pointed bows and sterns. They reminded us of Viking ships. We asked.

"A long time ago," said the bey, "the Russians came down the river Dnieper from the far North, crossed the Black Sea, and traded with the Turks. The ancestors of those stevedores copied the boats, and have been using them ever since. Now we keep them for lighters."

We rode back to the ship in one of them, behind a tug. Viking ships used as lighters! The Boss had done his work well.

Back in Italy we watched old Shaikh el Jabal and his friends at their evening prayers, as the boat swung around a headland. Three times a day all good Mussulmans knelt on prayer rugs and faced toward the south. But this time the captain took it into his head to change the course. It was unfortunate. The whole congregation had to call time out to shift their rugs.

When Jabal had finished and quieted, he waddled up to us. After the greeting salute, the cigarette refusal gesture, and the long monotonous chant of our travels, he sprung the startling news that we would stop in Trebizond.

Who has not heard of Trebizond? Xenophon and the ten thousand marched parasang after parasang, and stathmous after stathmous, to arrive there at last. They saw the water, the water for which they had longed, and the green hills echoed their joyful shout of triumph, "Thalassa! Thalassa!"

Since Xenophon climbed about those steep ravines the town has undergone a process of standardization. There were the red-tile roofs, the whitewashed walls, and the deep green foliage of every tropical village of the Azores, Brazil, Portugal, California, and Florida. There was nothing to set it in a class by itself but the lofty walls of ruined fortifications which rose, gray and battered, from the hillsides.

And yet here we found the real Turkey, unspoiled by the iron hand of the Ghazi: the old romantic setting which we had sought and previously failed to find. Even the bum-boat which took us ashore was rowed in a way to make a modern crew coach squirm, oars lazily flat in the water. Of course we had to make a bad start with Trebizond. The inevitable minion of the Ghazi met us minus his intelligence, went through the inevitable ceremony just as he had at Samsoun, and was finally convinced by Paul's fluent Turkish that we spoke nothing but German.

The Boss has done little in the way of civilization with Trebizond, except to leave a few battered automobiles lying around. All the noise that he is making filters only in a slight whisper to such out-of-the-way places. Here are the baggy-trousered men, the bazaars where fat old merchants quiver restfully in a sea of wares, the narrow streets filled with donkeys, and camels, and carriages, the Oriental gardens walled in by low-roofed dwellings.

And it is here that women are decent, and walk about the streets properly and modestly covered with the long black veil.

The women are so modest that they would rather show their bodies than their faces. We were climbing the side of a rocky ravine, followed by two females in flowing robes. Reaching the top, we turned to watch them. They halted. As long as we looked, they made no move to go on with their climbing. Paul's gentlemanly instincts finally asserted themselves. "We must turn our backs so that they can come on. They can't see to climb with those veils and they can't throw them back while we are looking."

It was true. As soon as we had turned to look steadily at the road, they came on, and as they reached the top and passed us, one of them bowed slightly. Were we curious! Both had beautiful ankles.

So this was the trade route to Persia! This little trail, winding on among the hills, was a great link between East and West. It must have been from that hilltop that the huge statue of Mithras gazed down at the caravans plodding slowly to the interior thousands of years ago. The Greeks probably marched along this very road in their mad rush to reach the sea and friends. And those crumbling walls across the ravine must have been built by the Romans as protection against the constant marauding of the interior tribes. Mithras, the Romans, the Greeks are gone, and only the long lines of heaving camels remain, bearing the civilization of the West into the heart of the East.

We followed the road back to town, staring at each new sight. A dazzling mosque stopped us, a mosque newly decorated in brilliant reds, purples, yellows, and covered with gorgeous designs. At the entrance lay a tomb, with wavy pink and red lines shading into cream-white along its carved sides, the corners ending in curious scrolls. A huge painted dome covered another large but simple coffin surrounded by ever-burning incense. All about the place stretched an extensive cemetery, filled with headstones set in regular rows, each one topped with a peculiar fluted turban and covered with the irregular scrawl of Arabic writing done in crumbling blue mosaic. If Allah's reward for the faithful is seven lovely virgin houris, who share the true Mussulman's couch in the hereafter, he must have been hard put to it to provide all those souls with their long awaited desire. "Allah, here's another soul just arrived." "By the beard of my Prophet, and we've no virgins in stock." But Allah is a merciful god!

Hidden down a little side street was all that was left of the white man's Heaven. There was something vaguely familiar about the great square barn of a building, and we realized what it was when we noticed the two crosses on the gables. We looked through a dirty shattered windowpane. In the dim light we saw an altar, battered, chipped, and dislocated, yet still bearing a broken crucifix. Behind it a few panes of colored glass hung crazily from leaded frames. A gaping hole in the roof let in the scanty light, and the walls were pitted with holes. The bare floor was covered with plaster and manure. As we looked, a lone white chicken strutted across the floor and jumped on the edge of the altar.

We wandered on, longing desperately for a friendly face. As if in answer to our prayer, we chanced upon the British flag floating above a charming English cottage, with a garden of roses below on the hillside. Here in Trebizond! We rubbed our eyes. There it was. There was even an English girl in an English smock picking flowers in the garden. Not a moment was lost. We burst in, and fell into the arms of an English gentleman, Consul of His Majesty, King George V.

He was delighted to see us, for he had not met one of his own race for eight months. He took us for a swim, made us thoroughly at home, told us all about Turkey, and was so hospitable that Paul, who had not even the tie of a common tongue as a claim to his hospitality, soon felt completely at ease, and discussed the Ghazi with him like an old friend. As we were eating our *Yorkshire pudding,* Harry discovered that the girl, Luna (it might have been Vera) was a cousin of some Spanish friends of his in Buenos Aires! We omit the remark that the world is small.

We dallied long over cigars and liqueurs, and the Consul told us a lot about Russia, all of it substantiating our own ideas on the subject. Back on shipboard that subject was uppermost in our minds, for the next morning we were to vanish into the unknown at Batoum. Paul, who had lived in the East, combined the Anglo-Saxon fearlessness with the Turkish Kismet idea, leaving everything to the will of Allah. But the other members of the brotherhood were not so confident. We listened to a radio concert from Vienna as if it were our last link with the outside world. We felt as though all our bridges had been burned.

To us Russia was a country inhabited by squat, stolid-looking men, dressed sloppily to an extreme, their faces covered with straggly, unkempt beards. Their wild, stringy hair rimmed bulgy noses and little, bleary, pig-like eyes. They usually hid smoking bombs slyly behind their backs, as they longingly contemplated a fat, well-dressed, top-hatted gentleman with a dollar sign embroidered on his vest. They always had a tag tied to their ragged shirt-tails, which they never tucked in, and the tag sometimes read "Communist" or "Bolshevik," and sometimes merely "Red." They were known to commit the most outrageous atrocities, such as chopping their enemies into little bits with penknives, or freezing them overnight in waist-deep water to be hacked out in the morning by other prisoners. They had no morals, and had turned their land into one long Bacchanalian orgy. They were always loaded with deadly weapons, and opened fire at the slightest pretext, particularly on foreigners, whom they hated. They had a spy system which watched catlike every suspect, and which perpetrated horrible tortures on those in whom they were interested. Sometimes they were seen squatting on soap-boxes, the usual pile of smoking bombs beside them, drinking deep from a bottle labeled "Vodka." They had no laws, no rights, no morals, no nothing. They were designated by the ominous word "Nihilists."

It was late at night, and we had been watching a full orange moon rising in the long afterglow of the sunset, which never seemed to fade. The black, twilight-crested hills were outlined against that indescribable soft pink blush, and covered with grotesque shadows. A delicate cool breeze, the breeze of a summer night, fanned our faces. "What's the use of all this horse feathers we've been pulling?" Pete interrupted. "We're going. Where's the argument?"

Kismet! It was the only way.

"But I do know one thing. My honeymoon won't be complete without this. God, what a smooth night." It needed only a girl with corn-colored hair and blue, blue eyes, and that cool breeze fanning—

"Oh, shut up. I'm going to bed!"

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAND OF SHIRT-TAILS-OUT

"When in Rome, shoot Roman candles."
Old Norse Proverb

IT was raining.

The dank, dreary drizzle dropped gloomily into the gray water. A damp, thin mist hung above it. Irregular patches of white splotched its flat surface. Soundlessly, heavily, the drops fell from the rail of the ship to the deck below.

Winches began to clank dully, shattering the silence with intermittent clashings. The still ship trembled with the sound. On and on, with varied monotony, the winches rattled in the quiet air.

Pete was gazing out the window. He turned, slowly, and sank to his bunk, his elbows resting on his knees. "Well, we're here," he muttered morosely, and began to dress.

Harry stirred a bit, opened his eyes, yawned, and asked, "Where?"

"Russia, you fool. We're in for it now."

Harry came to his feet. He looked out of the window, rubbing his eyes. There was nothing there but the flat, gray-white sea, cheerless, depressing.

Without a word we dressed and went on deck.

The heavy mist hung like a blanket over a half-circle of deep green hills. A town nestled in a hollow on the edge of the sea; quite an ordinary town, in fact, a rather nice-looking town. The ship moved in. As it drew closer, we could make out people walking in the streets, white houses, a dock. We went in to breakfast.

When we come out, the ship was quite close.

"Look," exclaimed Pete with a faint sign of excitement. "It's just an ordinary dock with derricks and everything. I don't see why we have to worry."

"You forget for the moment that we are entering a country of Red Revolution. The prospect isn't cheerful."

We were not frightened, that is, not exactly. The insecurity of it, our own lack of information, the feeling of not knowing what to expect, were scarcely comforting.

Harry was looking over the side. "Good Lord, Pete! Here They come," he whispered.

They tied Their launch and came up the gangplank. We drew back as They appeared, a dozen of Them.

Pete whispered softly: "They aren't so bad-looking. In fact, They're quite nice-looking. For heaven's sake, there's a woman!"

"Yeah, and They're all clean-shaven, all except that old man with the twinkling eyes."

"Very decent people," said Pete, momentarily cheered, "if you ask me."

Harry was still a bit skeptical. "I wouldn't go too much on looks. You notice they haven't tucked their shirt-tails in."

That was true. Each wore a white or gray blouse which came almost to his knees. Around the waist the blouse was gathered in by a thin leather belt, with several loose, metal-tipped ends hanging down. For hats They wore flat, military caps with visors.

"Maybe that's some sort of uniform," said Pete.

We were slowly growing excited. The mist rose from the hills, revealing dense, almost tropical shrubbery on the sky line. The green was singularly pleasant. The rain stopped for a moment. Two of Them were laughing as They strolled down the deck.

Paul suddenly appeared, looking as if his girl had just accepted him. We glowered, feeling that levity was hardly proper to the occasion. "And how do you like Russia?" he grinned cheerfully.

"Look out," grunted Pete out of the corner of his mouth. "There's a general right behind you. Let's go inside."

Beside us stood a tall, erect man in a new white uniform. A shudder of fright passed over us. He surely was spying. We walked away casually.

"Now," said Pete, when the three of us were alone, "this expedition has to be careful what it says for publication. You can't tell who might be listening. I vote we say nothing but praise of this country while we're in it. We mustn't razz the government, the climate, the people, or each other, but particularly the government. We don't want to get into trouble with the System."

"Oh," said Paul with a laugh, "I shall do as I like. If I do not like something, I shall say so."

"Well, just because you've got a diplomat's laisser passer don't you get us into trouble."

The motion was voted, two to one.

Harry had another motion. "I move we adopt as our permanent motto 'When in Rome, shoot Roman candles.' If we dress like 'em, talk like 'em, eat like 'em, and drink like 'em, They won't notice us. O.K.?"

"No," said Paul again. "I shall be myself."

But majority ruled, and we settled it. We came out again.

"Dawai!" somebody told us. It was our first order. We were taken, a bit troubled, into the presence of the People. "Passport!"

They sat around a long table, writing. They looked like pictures in the *New York Times* of the village soviet of Upaginst. Good, plain and simple people, taking their work seriously, disdainful of frills and of those who affected them. One of Them smiled a greeting to us. They glanced at our papers, grunted, returned them.

In less than a minute we were lugging our heavy duffel bags down the gangplank and on to the dock.

We looked back at the ship, symbol of safety and civilization. We felt as if we were dropping down a well, bottom unknown, and no way out. With a transit visa through Russia to Kashgar we were certainly cutting off all possible chances of turning back. There was no appeal in the whole land for us, no consul, no representative of our government. We were completely severed from home and friends, without a thing to rely upon in case of trouble. The ship was the last link.

"Sudah!" a soldier in a red-trimmed khaki uniform pointed with his rifle. We turned and trudged onward. It began to pour.

Without warning we found ourselves comfortably chatting with a girl in French, inside the custom house.

She had Titian hair crowning a calm sweet face, and she looked as if her name should be Mildred. "How much Soviet money have you?" she asked, her smooth young face dimpling with a smile. Our hearts beat faster.

"None." That was easy.

"We didn't know you used money here," said Harry conversationally, gazing deep into her eyes of blue.

She smiled, started to say something, and changed her mind. She must have considered us too young for a lesson in Communism. "How many suits of clothes?"

That was just as easy. "Only what you see on us."

More delightfully yet, she giggled musically. "Any arms or cameras?"—staring at Harry's rifle case and Pete's camera box.

"Oh, yes! Two cameras and a gun."

"Why are you going to Kashgar?" she asked, resting her little chin on her folded hands and tapping her forehead where the hair came to a peak, with her pencil.

"Hunting," was all we could think of.

A roar of laughter greeted this. A heavy-jowled man whom we had not noticed slapped his thigh. She chuckled softly. "I wish you luck. Nothing more to declare? Eh bien, pass out that door to your right."

Pass out? Were we free? No examinations? Our books untouched? We had left a letter from Senator Borah in Constantinople because it said we were students of politics. A diplomat deep in the affairs of Russia (unofficially) had warned us that They would surely find it and put us in jail. "Pass out by that door to your right!"

"Whew!" said Pete. "That is the nicest customs I've ever been through. If Russia is only easy officials and girls like Mildred I see maybe where we're going to like it."

"Say, can I help you boys in any way?"

A low, controlled voice spoke behind us. It was no ordinary voice. It was the most musical voice we had ever heard. It drawled softly. "If I can do anything for you—" *It spoke American!*

We whirled. There was its owner. It went on, "My name's Norton. I'm with the Standard Oil here in Batoum." We shook hands, dazed.

"Come on out to my car and I'll show you around."

We broke at last. It was impossible to keep control. A cheer shook the house. The Schroeder-Peters Expedition became wildly unrestrained, but he never batted an eyelash. He must have been used to it.

"Come on, Paul," Harry shouted. "The Expedition is going to move on. We found an American."

There were two of them in that little town, two Americans. "The loneliest boys north of the equator," some one called them. "The only fun they get is meeting the boats."

We met the other one in the middle of town. Norton stopped the car. "Hey, Bill, I've picked up something. Bill, this is Schroeder and Peters of Yale, your old dump, on their way to some place called Kashgar."

Bill came forward and shook hands. We liked him at once.

"This is Mike, our interpreter." Mike stepped up. He was one of those strapping Russians, powerful, handsome, and yet with a twinkle in his eye and a rare sense of humor.

"You'll need some money, won't you?"

"That's right, we will."

"Mike can get your American cash changed for you. He knows the ropes around here, and he won't gyp you. Better give him all your cash, and he'll scout around to the bank and bring it back in rubles."

We handed over our fortunes without a murmur.

Norton spoke rather savagely as we drove away. "You sure are two dumb fools. Do you realize that you handed over that money to a man you'd known for two minutes on the advice of one you'd known for ten?"

"Yes, but—"

"It just happens that Mike is all right and I'm all right. But suppose we weren't? You listen to me. Don't you trust anybody in this country or you'll get reamed. This is no place for kids."

It tickled Harry's sense of humor after the shame had worn off. We, trusting in casual strangers, expected to go to Kashgar! Fifteen minutes among the Reds and we had invested a good part of our fortunes in the honesty of a chance acquaintance. And we thought we could make Kashgar!

Norton drove us out to the Standard Oil residence, and took our baggage. Then he left us to our own devices until lunch time. We sallied forth, cameras in hand, to see the town.

"Don't get into any trouble," was Norton's parting shot.

The first thing we saw was a magnificent old church. A double cross surmounted the large dome, which was pointed at the top and swollen at the base. Spires, pinnacles, and carvings combined to give its splendid lines a touch of ornateness.

We entered, all three of us, removing our hats according to custom. "For the love of Pete, they all have their hats on," whispered Harry. When in Rome, shoot Roman candles. Paul, the individualist, was the only one who kept his off.

Pete glanced about him. "This is sure a funny church."

"I think," said Paul calmly, "that it is a museum."

It was. The walls were covered with blue and gold ikons. Colorful hangings and paintings lent a dazzle to the dim interior. The paraphernalia seemed in readiness for a big service.

But all about the floor were scattered cases of specimens of the produce of the country, of rocks and ores, wax anatomy models, and stuffed animals. The effect was weird.

A beautiful painting of Christ on the cross, gaunt and sorrow-stricken, took a prominent position near the altar. Before the picture, and of a same size with it, was an elaborately labeled human skeleton with the Red flag hanging over it.

"Look here," said Pete. "Stand right near the door where I am. See that bust?" It was Lenin carved in marble. Behind the bust a gold-haloed cross was placed so that the circle of shining gold seemed to ring the head of Communism's Chief.

The place was full of people. Paul started to take some photographs. We went outside, and began to snap the town in the manner of American tourists. In a public square was a statue of Lenin pointing at the Truth. Paul posed it carefully.

With a shout six soldiers swooped down upon the luckless Expedition. "No, no," they exclaimed, and marched us off under guard.

"Now we've done it," groaned Harry. "If you get out and I don't, tell Betsy I was faithful to her to the bitter end."

"Dawai!" grunted the soldiers; one of them passed his finger across his chin. There was nothing to be done. Paul marched ahead between two soldiers proudly, confident in his position as a diplomat. Pete slouched along gloomily. Harry lagged behind, prodded by occasional gun-butts from the rear guard. The populace turned to stare. We sensed their pity for us, pity that three such fine young men should be cut off in their prime. The cortège went slowly. A bugle blowing taps would have completed the situation.

"Dawai!" grunted the soldiers, turning us aside into a building. Jail! A uniformed officer sat behind a desk. He looked up, frowning fearfully. Soldiers spouted Russian and our case grew blacker.

Then up stepped the faithful Paul. "Do you speak German?" he began, and his voice was timid.

The officer could.

"These are two American students who have come to study your great country." The officer looked at our passports and threw them aside contemptuously.

"I am a citizen of Sweden on a special diplomatic mission for my country. My way is not to be hindered."

The man seemed surprised. He examined Paul's papers, nodded. "But these two, these—they are not on a special mission. They are spies, caught photographing our borders. It is forbidden." His face grew firm.

"Now listen," said Paul in his best diplomatic manner. "They are both young and they are in your country for the first time. Their ideas have not yet formed. If you make a good impression on them, they will take back to America the doctrines of Lenin and Communism. If you make their stay difficult they will tell America that Russia is disorganized and should not be recognized by their own country. You know the value of recognition for the Soviet Union? Do you wish that harm to your land?"

"All right," said Lenin's minion. "Only don't take any more pictures of the border." He smiled and shook hands. "I hope you enjoy your stay in our country." We felt like paroled lifers.

"I guess we'd better begin to be careful," said Pete.

Paul was cheerful. "Nonsense. We shall do as we like." And just to prove it, he took a picture of the police station.

"Let's call on the Near East Relief," said Harry. "I just remembered Pete has a card to a fellow named Boskovnikoff. Come along, Paul. We'll make them relieve you too."

The white-bearded Armenian who received us was apparently accustomed to taking care of travelers. He detailed a man to buy our tickets, get our accommodations, and put us on the train. He told us that we could stay with the Relief, in Tiflis, and ushered us out.

"Did you give him money?" demanded Norton when we got back.

"Oh, Gosh, we did!"

Norton looked. For a long time he was silent. When he had regained control over himself, he said: "That Armenian has been thinking of retiring for some time. The relief of the starving Armenians is a good business for a wide-awake feller. I wish you luck."

"Oh, stop blowing them up," said Bill, "and give them a shot of *fine champagne* and a swim. They deserve it."

Paul was then initiated into the primary custom of the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition; that of never refusing a drink.

"As for the swim," Pete told Bill, "we haven't any bathing suits. Can you lend us some?"

"Neither have we," was the startling answer. "They don't wear them here."

"Wha-at?"

"Sure. It's a great sight." Bill laughed.

Shoot Roman candles! We undressed on the beach.

A rough expanse of gravel and cobblestones fringes the shore. Behind it are houses, lawns, and dirty streets. The home of the Standard Oil faces this beach. The Black Sea waves dash violently in, filled with gravel and small boulders. We battled the strong current for a while, and then stretched on the hot stones.

At first it was hard to accustom oneself to it. The veneer of civilization did not wash off at once. Somehow one's eyes wandered sideways when a beautiful Georgian female strolled by.

Paul was not swimming. "Ha!" he laughed. "I have the advantage. They can see as much of you as you can of them. But I am dressed. Russia is a great country." That made us attend strictly to business, and soon we thought nothing of it.

"What is this Cheka anyway?" Harry asked lazily, sunning himself in public for the first time in his life.

Bill jumped. "Sh! Mike's one of them. He might wake up and hear you."

Mike one of them! That handsome devil with the disarming smile a spy? That big, fine-looking Russian a member of the all-powerful secret police?

"Yeah, that's how we keep out of trouble. We give him a job. He doesn't have much to do, but he's worth his weight in gold." The walls do have ears!

"Does the government fool much with your business?"

"They sure do. We let Mike fix it. This is one hell of a place. Even the women are awful." We hadn't noticed that. "I never thought when I got out of Yale I'd be stuck in this joint."

Norton turned over. "The other day they took one of our two cars away because they said that nobody should ride while his comrades walked. And they don't let us fire any of our men without a month's notice and a thorough investigation by a committee of workmen. You know what that means; he doesn't get fired."

"Yeah, it's tough. See that house of ours? A prince owns it. He's one of the last of them left. They'll take him away some day and no one will hear of him again. Oh, well, let's go in for another dip and then tackle more of that cognac. We just got it in yesterday from Constant. Cognac and the last month's papers are all the fun we get."

We lay around most of the afternoon, for the cognac was excellent. And then Mike came to take us down to the train. We knew that we had missed a large amount of interesting details on this, our first day, but cognac!

The station was filled with a howling, rearing mob. Strange to say, the man from the Near East Relief was there with the tickets, and it was he who put us on the train, in first-class wagon-lit compartments. We stood on the platform talking to Mike.

"By the way, Mike, old man. There's one thing that has been bothering us all day. See that man dressed in white over there with the soldier's cap on? Is that a uniform or what? He has his shirt-tails out as you have, but it looks like the clothes of a general. We've seen lots of them around."

"Oh, no!" Mike was horrified. "We have no generals. That is the customary dress of the Russian people. The shirt is the roobashki; all our people wear them, some of white, some brown or blue. The hat is the usual Russian hat."

"Can we buy an outfit like that? Do you have to belong to any club to wear it? There's no law against it, is there?"

Mike looked at us. "The Union is a free country," he said severely. "We do as we like in the Soviet State."

A little lady interrupted us. We had seen her on the boat, but had been unable to speak to her, for she had kept to herself all the way. She was small, vivacious, blue-eyed, and now extremely excited. She jabbered at Mike in Russian. It seemed that she could get no tickets. Mike squared his shoulders, pushed through the mob, and bought her accommodations for her. We helped her on the train.

"Good-by, Mike, old man. Take good care of the Cheka."

If the Cheka was like Mike we had nothing to worry about. We later learned that he had befriended a Russian girl whom we knew. She was visiting her mother in Batoum without a visa or permission; one of those sad cases where aristocratic families have been separated by the Revolution. She had come all the way from America with us, and left us in Constantinople. Although her presence in Russia was forbidden, Mike quickly became her big brother during her short stay. He didn't seem to be so bloodthirsty where fair maidens were concerned.

Mike was kind, but he was also crafty. By some fiendish thought he had put the little lady in the compartment between Paul's and ours.

She was extremely attractive. Harry thought so at any rate. "She speaks only with the hands, the eyes, and the smile," said Paul, but she spoke extremely well. She had wavy brown hair, and a wide, childish smile which could make one understand anything.

We hauled out the conversation book. We soon learned that she had a "mari" and two "bébés" in Trieste, that she was twenty-two, had run away from Russia at seventeen, and that her name was Falia. Falia! What a name! Falia!

The scenery of Georgia, through which the train was dashing, was forgotten. Besides, it was too dark to see anything of the green-covered mountains. The women of Georgia, supposed to be the world's most beautiful, were not forgotten, at least not one of them. But Pete never allowed anything to interfere with his sleep. He and Paul retired, while Harry and Falia sat far into the night over the "Russian Self-Taught."

The conversation took some time to get started. Harry knew a little Latin and could speak French, both of which he tried to twist into Italian. Falia knew Italian and Russian, and had possession of the Russian-English dictionary.

"You mari bono?" asked Harry, breaking the ice.

"Si, si! Molto bono." Falia giggled delightfully. "Due bébé!"

Silence.

"Mari work, travailler?" demanded Harry, moving his arms to simulate a ditch-digger at his trade.

"Si. Lloyd Triestino navigatio."

Deep thought.

"I lof America," broke in Falia, bursting into a torrent of English. "America bono, molto bene."

"I love Rooski mammas," Harry countered tactfully.

The conversation was predestined to become more personal. After all, this was Russia. Falia attacked the conversation book, pointing out the phrases.

"I am so pleased to meet (see) you—make your acquaintance."

"The pleasure is all mine, I assure you. I hope we may meet again."

"You are very kind."

"Pray don't mention it."

"I like being here," pointed Falia with blushing finger, a new light in her deep blue eyes.

Harry had a ready answer. "It gives me much pleasure."

Falia discovered the list of "useful verbs and adjectives." "Harry good, handsome, kind, pleasant, polite, tender," said Falia in alphabetical order.

"Falia beautiful," he answered simply.

"Harry clever, young."

"Oh, no! Falia clever, little (small), pretty, sweet, warm," was the smooth reply.

"Harry joke. Harry praise, forget," said Falia with a woman's intuition.

"Oh, no, never. Harry remember always." He repeated in Russian that phrase which is the first thing one learns in a new language. "Harry always faithful."

"Repeat," pointed Falia, settling back with a sigh.

It was some time before she found the word she was looking for. Like a woman, she looked at it, giggled, and turned the pages rapidly. He knew what it was, and sprang to the front.

"No, no. Me mari!"

He had the usual argument. "Mari Italia, Falia Russia."

"Non bene."

"Bene," he insisted, for she had discovered it.

"Yes," she gave in. "Like bébé." She pointed to her forehead.

"For God's sake," groaned Pete, "will you never come to bed?"

CHAPTER FOUR

MARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA

"Proletariat of All the World, Unite!"
Song of the Soviets

TIFLIS! "Tiflis, jewel of Kafkaz, Queen of snow-topped Georgia." Tiflis.

It lies at the head of a long valley whose foot is on the Caspian Sea. About it are the lofty Caucasus Mountains; to the east the rolling hills of the valley. In the center of the city rises a huge hill, steep and vine-grown. A swift little river rushes madly through the town between high cliffs, dashing down the valley to the Caspian three hundred miles away.

It is a city of broad streets and wide white buildings; a city of churches and palaces and magnificent homes; a city of trees, and gardens filled with shrubbery, and extensive parks.

If you want food, you eat your shashlik, your blinchkis, and your caviar under the trees in an open-air restaurant. Your beer and vodka is drunk in the open under the skies. Entertainments are held in huge outside auditoriums, where you can hear a symphony orchestra almost any evening. Tiflis is a metropolis with the heart of a summer resort.

We felt completely lost in the dirty howling mob at the railroad station. Falia had disappeared after a glass of tea on the train with Harry. A sea of strange staring faces met us. We were enveloped and submerged in the expanse of shirt-tails, red ones, yellow ones, white ones.

Two dozen filthy tramps descended upon us. "Feidung!" they yelled in our ears. "Feidung!"

"Paul, what's a feidung?" Paul didn't know, but he was in favor of finding out. They seemed to want our baggage. Cautiously we gave one small piece to a man, and followed him.

He took us to an ancient victoria, the kind of carriage which one wears with a top hat and cane when one puts on dog. "I understand," said Paul. "He means phaeton!"

We chartered two of the tottering relics. "Amerikanski Komitet," we told the driver, following the instructions of Boskovnikoff of Batoum. It was rather fun rolling the words around and spitting them out like true Russians. We knew that it meant "Near East Relief."

He drove for miles through wide, deserted streets, lined with tall, square houses. Everything seemed closed. We suddenly remembered that it was Sunday morning.

A broad, tree-covered avenue seemed more populous. White shirt-tails strolled slowly down its length. Magnificent marble and stone buildings with immense gates and drives flanked it. It could have replaced any of the world's famous streets, and bettered most of them as far as beauty went. Rustaveli Street. It made the Rue de la Paix look like an alley.

Over the tops of what must have once been palaces of princes floated the Red Flag, emblazoned in gold with the Hammer and the Scythe.

At the Near East no one was at home but a dumb

Russian maid. We left the doorman to argue over the price with the driver, and appropriated a bedroom, making ourselves comfortable. Then the Expedition went off to see the town.

The streets had the most tongue-twisting names, as we discovered when we tried to locate ourselves. Until one gets used to it, one can never remember the things. "Makhadaradskaya Oolitza" is asked for by saying simply with rising inflection "Madsky?" If you want Mikhailovoskaya" you merely mutter "Meeholfsky," and wait for the noise to come. We found that out when we tried to get home.

Paul wanted to take a picture. The other members of the Expedition were against it. "Have you already forgotten what happened yesterday at Batoum?"

Paul insisted. Finally it was agreed that two out of three should always be on guard to watch for Cheka and soldiers.

Three figures strolled along over the bridge which spans the little torrent, nonchalantly lighting mental Murads. They melted into the crowd. At one end of the bridge a man was seen to pause and puff at a pipe. There was a suspicious bulge under the coat of a slim figure in the center. Suddenly above the noise of the traffic could be heard a thin, sharp whistle, the opening bars of the Swedish national anthem. The lounging figure lounged on. The pipe smoker paused a moment, and the sad sweet strains of the Gay Caballero burst upon the noisy street. The slim man in the center of the bridge stiffened, sunlight flashed on metal, and—"All right, I have it. Let's move before they call out the Reserves."

"There's a church." Harry pointed at a tall, domed building with a double cross over it. "Maybe they've got a stuffed wombat. Let's go in and see." No buffalo exhibits met our eyes as we entered, no grinning skeletons adorned the walls. It was a church.

The place was crowded with people; old men and women, children, and a scattering of beggars. The peculiar thrilling harmony of a rich-voiced choir vibrated back and forth, and an old priest who wore a gorgeous robe and an expression of painful resignation bandied back at the hidden singers long monotonous chants. It was immensely impressive. The service was of course the usual Russian Orthodox continuous show, with the white-haired old priest or archbishop making lightning changes of costume behind closed doors while his double took his place haranguing the choir. Somehow the barbarity and the splendor of it got on Paul's Nordic nerves. It was so different from Odin worship, or whatever they have in Sweden. "I don't like this. I want to go," he whispered. We paid the price of exit to the old woman who sold candles at the counter and left. We were deeply moved, especially by the dignity and stateliness of the white general's outfits everybody wore.

"Well, now what'll we do?" Harry wanted to know.

"There's that smooth mountain over there. It ought to give us a good view. What's the percentage in going up it?" Pete was feeling energetic.

We headed for it, and found that there was no outlet for Pete's energy, for a nice funicular railway climbed the side and landed us on the top cool and dry. The day was hot, and the Sunday crowds were enjoying their afternoon walk. Soldiers and best girls, more soldiers and some not so good girls, simple tradesmen and wives and troops of clean little children, plain stolid peasants and white-bearded, proud-looking ex-aristocrats: the proletariat at play. Laughing, joking, chatting, they strolled about, glad of their day of rest.

We sat down at a little table near an orchestra and took in the view, sipping our beer. The wide, deep valley of the town rose into gently sloping, green hills. Far in the background the snow-capped Caucasus glimmered faintly.

"Look out," whispered Pete. "We're being watched."

Soldiers were all about us, staring, peeking through bushes, loitering by with side glances in our direction. We left, wondering what we had done, and trying to appear inconspicuous in our worn European clothes and tucked-in shirt-tails. Harry chanced to look back as he hurried. The soldiers were still loitering. A smooth, red-lipped blonde rose from a table and sauntered near them. They flocked after her.

No more of this. Tomorrow we would buy a couple of union suits and be inconspicuous among the proletariat. Even in the funicular on the way back to town the Army paid us too much attention. With our death in their hearts soldiers delivered a barrage of wise-cracks and evil grins at us.

Again it was a woman, and not we, who held their notice. She sat opposite us. She was young, strong, wild. She spat something at the Army. They cheered. Her desert-bred eyes flashed fire, the fire of great open spaces and jungles. She tossed her coal-black hair fiercely. Her movements were graceful with the grace of the tiger; she possessed the freedom of the children of nature. Pete was impressed. "Native. She's native!"

As we boarded a trolley car, we saw her marching down the street acting as right guide and commanding officer to the laughing regiment.

A famous American once went to Russia. Upon his return he was asked his impressions of the people. "It is significant," he said, "that there is not one smiling face in the whole land." Certainly our afternoon research seemed to deny his statement. And in the evening the comparative untruth in his words was made more evident to us. We had heard that there was some sort of concert going on somewhere, and so we scouted around until we found it. There was a sixty-piece orchestra playing to a capacity audience in a more or less open-air auditorium with a roof on it. To our intense surprise the show started with Beethoven's Egmont Overture. Schumann, Wagner, and a number of Russian composers with unpronounceable names were all treated in a manner worthy of the New York Philharmonic. In the middle of the concert it began to rain. When it rains in Tiflis it doesn't stop at a mere Batoum drizzle. The roof sprung a big leak, and buckets of water splashed down on a small section of the audience. During an intermission an old man tottered up with a large piece of canvas, climbed on the rafters and tried to fix it. The wind, however, was determined to oppose his feeble efforts. He would get the canvas in place, fill it with water, and then the wind would whip it out of his hands. Gallons of water sprayed over the whole audience, drenching everyone. "Damn him," we thought, "the old clumsy fool! He's getting us soaked." You see, we had the proper capitalist attitude. But not the audience. Roars of laughter went up as each new shower descended on white shirts and best dresses. No smiling faces? Imagine the same situation in Carnegie Hall. No smiling faces? The whole place enjoyed the wetting hugely; everyone indulged in a lot of good, clean fun.

Apparently all the fun was not so clean, from the eyes that a sleek black-haired girl cast in our direction, and from the way she giggled at her two blonde friends. "I think that young lady is looking at me," said Paul, his cold Nordic blood warming. "Let us stroll in her direction during the next intermission. It might prove pleasant."

"Paul, you forget yourself," Harry rebuked. "This expedition has its standards and ideals. You have not been properly introduced. Besides, she's looking at me."

"I'm sorry to differ, but she's looking at me," Pete was confident. "But I hate shiny hair. Let's go home. She looks too greasy."

Paul still wanted to do things after the concert. In the garden surrounding the auditorium were shooting galleries, games of chance, beer joints, and cool, shady walks. Paul found a place where a man was playing chess against thirty straining opponents. "I will have some mental stimulation, at any rate," he said. "I am president of our chess club in Stockholm, and I think I could beat that man."

We dragged him away and made him practice for his trip to Afghanistan in the shooting gallery.

The whole evening cost twenty cents, with the concert thrown in. For members of the union the price of admission to the garden was five cents. The next morning Madame H., the head of the Near East of Tiflis, told us that the government ran the whole thing for the People.

It was quite a relief for us, the unadapted, to find two nice middle-aged ladies to talk with after the strain of foreign streets and unknown languages. Madame H. was German, and her assistant, Miss Jackson, came from Kansas. Kansas!

We were full of questions. "What is Communism anyway, and what does it prove?"

That was a hard one. Miss Jackson had lived three years in Tiflis, and was only just beginning to understand. It seemed so completely upside-down. No private property. State ownership of everything: railways, stores, houses, hotels, restaurants, movie theaters. Equality. A dictatorship of a class (the proletariat) in a country professing to be ultrademocratic. Workers owning factories and running them, capitalists forced to beg. It was hard to figure out. Every known standard was gone, abolished.

The good lady told us many tales which enhanced our own lurid ideas of the Reds. Censored letters. Mysterious spies. Dark, evil doings. Soldiers coming in the night. "Only a month ago one of our men was shot. Why? Nobody knows. He was probably suspected of counter-revolutionary tendencies. They came, took him away, and that was the last we heard of him. Yes, it was the Cheka, or the Gay-Pay-Oo, as they call it now." We were secretly thrilled. No crude bombs for these people. Instead, spies, and death committees, secret police, and blank walls at sunrise. Reds at work. Socialism, Bolshevism, no, stark, cold Nihilism! Yes, by all means Nihilism! The word was pregnant with vague terror and secret machinations. This was real Nihilism! We shuddered with glee.

"And yet on the other side there are many good things to be said for the System. The government schools are so good that they have progressed way beyond our schools, and we are closing up entirely this year." What, the government so kind to the starving Armenians that there was nobody to relieve any more? We were slightly disappointed.

"And it is a fact that the people are better off now than they were under the czarist régime. Everyone is equal in rights, regardless of color, race, creed, or position."

"But, Miss Jackson? You say that everyone has equal rights. Does that mean no rights?"

"Well, just now there isn't much say in the government for the average man. But they are doing a lot for him. They've established good schools and colleges, recreation gardens, exhibits, concerts, vacation camps, and museums."

"Yes, we saw a church that went out of business and is now a museum, in Batoum. But how about the poor little capitalist, the small storekeeper, the middleman, the big manufacturer?"

"Of course they're all gone. The State takes on that position."

"Well, what do you really think of it? Do you think it'll work?"

"In my opinion it will evolve as a natural process into what is best for the people of Russia. Whether that will be a democracy, a monarchy, or an anarchy I don't know. But I feel confident that the people will pull themselves together and make for themselves the system of government that is best for them."

The great power of the people! It had always happened in just that way. It was a natural process, as she said, the people demanding what best suited their racial needs. In any great crisis during a people's development radicalism came first, and then the people settled down sooner or later to make what they needed of it. One had to expect the severe laws, and the countless rules, and the dictatorship—until the people grew tired of it.

This business of registering! We had to get special permission to stay in Tiflis from the local office of the Gay-Pay-Oo, and pay three rubles for it. Everyone had to do the same—everyone from out of town. It all came under the head of shooting Roman candles.

Paul was against the Roman candle idea, heart and soul. To us there was a glory in slipping unnoticed through the crowd; a thrill in belonging. But Paul refused to lose his individuality. He would not join us in buying the full Russian outfit.

Madame H. had delegated a fellow with the engaging name of Sookiokoff to show us around. We took the faithful Sukie into a store, and using him as a model, bought white roobashki and caps of linen, black, thin belts, and yellow, embroidered shirts which would not show the dirt. We put them on. Paul sneered. "No, I will not booie (buy) one. I will not look like a Bolshevist."

He missed the pride we felt when we strutted down the streets with shirt-tails out. He remained a capitalist to the last, but we belonged! He was an outsider, but we were cogs in the Machine!

Harry saw a sign on a little booth: Kvas, 5 K. "Look, Pete. Kvas. Doesn't that remind you of something? Knife dances, or stolid, bleary-eyed peasants in Siberia?"

"Sure, it's a kind of drink."

"Have we ever passed up a drink?" We looked at each other.

"Done." We held up two fingers. "Kvas!" A brown, bubbly liquid was poured out. We drank.

"Hell," said Pete. "It's only cider."

"It's funny-tasting cider. It's probably got some obscure drug in it. Let's have another." We were thrilled by its unknown nature.

"It must be very alcoholic," said Harry, smacking his lips. "It doesn't taste as if it had much of a kick, but then, these Russian things never do. Probably sneaks up and bites you when you aren't looking."

That was a Roman candle in earnest. Our disguise was almost complete. The only thing necessary now to make us true Russians was to have a beautiful lady on our arm. But there seemed to be a dearth of those beauties for which Georgia is so famous. Perhaps they stayed indoors. Or perhaps they had been thrown out of the country. They certainly were not in the streets.

Pete suddenly jumped. "There's one. The first well-dressed woman we have seen. Over there, across the street. She's O.K. too. Must be the last of those beautiful Georgians we've heard so much about."

Harry stared. "The one in white? Great jumping Judas! It's Falia."

That evening Pete had nothing to do. Harry was off on a date. Paul had gone with some friends of his from the Swedish Ball-Bearing Company office. Pete was left alone.

Nine o'clock found him in a garden sipping beer and waiting for a concert to begin. It was a warm, balmy evening, a romantic evening, a soft, sensuous Caucasian evening, and Pete was thinking of Harry's luck in being able to use it.

A young Armenian strolled up and asked him in Russian when the concert was to begin, or possibly, "How do you fry eggs in South Africa?" It was all the same to Pete.

"Quite well, thank you," Pete replied in his best Chinook. "And you?"

"Nemetski?" asked the Armenian, meaning, "Are you German?"

"No," said Pete. "Amerikanski."

"Oh, ah." He hurried off, probably for the police. Inside of five minutes Pete found himself completely surrounded by at least thirty or forty Russians, Georgians, and Armenians, all young and eager, and all firing questions at him. They were brilliant fellows, however, and soon discovered that he was one of those unfortunate people who cannot speak Russian. From somewhere they raked up a fellow who could talk French, and the questions began to filter through to Pete.

"Does every workman in America own a car?"

"Oh, yes, two or three of them," Pete answered.

"Does every workman really get five dollars a day?"

"Certainly, five, or ten, or maybe fifteen."

The next question came fast. It was unanimous. "How can I get to America?"

So that was how our great country was settled! The lure of five dollars a day and a car. These fellows were supposed to be communistic, and above the lure of money. Yet they did have an innate loyalty to their cause. "Did you know Sacco and Vanzetti?"

"Gosh, I'd forgotten about those bozos!" Pete thought. He smiled. "Oh, yes, very well."

"What do you think of the way your country treated them?"

"It was a happy day for us when they got hung."

As the words were translated, a low murmur went through the crowd, hissing softly. Feet shuffled, hands crept toward belts where lay wicked-looking knives. The mob pressed closer, leering. "Not even five days in the country," thought Pete.

A frown came over the interpreter's face, followed quickly by a forced smile. He raised his voice and talked earnestly for a few minutes, as if in argument. The crowd burst into laughter. What he said Pete never knew, but he probably told them that Pete had confused Sacco with the Czar. Pete flashed him a look of gratitude and warily asked for more questions.

Twelve o'clock came and Pete tried to get home. It was not so easy. At last he broke away, and twenty comrades escorted him to the Near East Relief, firing questions all the way, exchanging addresses, offering invitations to a forbidden club, and singing a final farewell.

song. A pajama-clad figure rushed down the stairs. "Was it the Gay-Pay-Oo?"

"No," Pete smiled. Life was sweet after all.

"What did you do last night?" Pete asked the next morning. "You came in rather early for a date. Wasn't the babe all you expected?"

Harry was sore. "Doggone her, anyway! I went to have dinner with her and she dragged along a German lady she was staying with. We fooled around, had some cheese in the German lady's room, and I came home. I didn't see her alone at all."

We spent the day looking for kvas and meeting Pete's student friends of the night before. Paul had got mixed up in some way, and was leaving by an earlier train, so we escorted him to the station riding in style in a new Lincoln. It belonged to one of his capitalistic compatriots, a big ball-bearing man from Oslo. We were sorry that a couple of the students saw us riding in such a capitalistic way. It seemed too bad to shatter their illusions.

Paul had quite a time leaving, he told us later. He had put all his baggage on the train, and was strolling about the platform waiting for the starting bell. He too had heard of the Georgian women,—that they were the loveliest specimens of female pulchritude in the world. As he walked he chanced to see a couple of girls who lived up to his ideals of the native race. Out came his camera. He stalked them quietly, and caught a picture. Then from nothingness a fearful Gay-Pay-Oo swooped like some dreadful ogre. "You are under arrest," he shouted, and left a fully armed soldier to guard Paul, while he consulted his superiors. The train started to move. Paul waited a moment. There went his baggage. His fighting blood was up, and he started to run. The soldier was astonished. Such a thing had never happened to him before. He was torn between shooting, running, or yelling. He did none of them. He stood.

The Gay-Pay-Oo came back and began to chase Paul. Then everyone began to run. Paul had a howling mob at his heels. But he came from the race which produces Nurmis, and he won. Swinging aboard the last car, he thumbed his nose very politely but quite firmly in the faces of his pursuers.

At the next station fifty soldiers met the train. They surrounded it while a party of ten officers went aboard. Guns in hand, they marched to Paul's compartment. They locked the door. "Passport!" the leader commanded, grim as death. Paul handed it over. They scanned it slowly. His fate hung by a thread. The leader returned it. "Thank you," he smiled—smiled and shook hands. The other nine shook hands also. The Death Squad filed out, leaving Paul to meditate upon the system. Sic semper capitalism!

We were to follow Paul four hours later, but first we had important business. Pete suddenly remembered that he had left all his maps on his bed at college!

That was a nice mess. No maps! We expected to take a horseback ride over the wilds without a chart. Funny?

It was impossible to get what we wanted. We finally bought a very poor one of the Soviet Union, which stressed principally the new division of the Union into smaller republics. Kashgar wasn't even on it!

It did tell us the name of the country we were in.

After a week of steady practice we were able to say it without spitting. "Soyooz Sotzialisticheskikh Sovietskikh Respooblik." That was what those cryptic initials "C.C.C.P." (S.S.S.R. in English) meant. The Union of Socialistic Soviet Republics. On the top was the good old "Pick and Shovel" with "Proletariat of all the World, Unite!" and a five-pointed red star—"Revolution in Five Continents."

We traced out our route into the great Turkestan district of the Union. First we entered the Turkmenistan Socialist Soviet Republic. At Bokhara it was the Uzbekistan Republic, and Osh lies in the Kirghizistan Autonomous District. We didn't care. We were going to Kashgar.

The Roman candle in traveling is to leave for the station an hour before train time, as no tickets are sold until the train is in. The Near East man bought the tickets, gave them to us, and departed. We had arrived in a feidung behind a hairy Cossack, and had entrusted the baggage to a burly Kurd (at least he looked like a Kurd). He took the tickets and left.

Train time. No Kurd. Worried, we ran all over the station. Out in the street we found him, wiping beer suds from his moustache (or was it whey?). "Train Baku!" we shouted in his ear.

"Oh!" he said, surprised. "I thought you wanted to go to Bhedde."

Fighting through guards, we barely caught the moving train. The Kurd stood looking at us, holding out his hands for baksheesh. Then it was that we lost our tempers. We flung at him the only really wicked Russian swear word we knew. We had picked it up from a New Haven

Smoke Shop cook. It was a filthy word, but he deserved it. "You're crazy," we shouted. He melted.

The train jogged slowly toward Kashgar and the lands of the Sunrise, cutting off our last connection with the outside world. From now on there would be no Americans, no Near East, no Standard Oil. Only Paul was left. But he would be leaving soon, at Askhabad in the Black Sand desert. After that, we should have to face the unknown of Asia, alone.

"Don't forget Dicky Halliburton," said Pete.

Harry's face was set. He pulled down the rifle and began to clean it, methodically, morosely.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM SHIRT-TAIL TO SHAKO

"... B'koo;
Karasnovodski, Mairrf, Bukhara-a-a"
Ancient Persian Lullaby

RIDING on a Russian train is a never-to-be-forgotten experience. For those souls in whom the gambling instinct is strong there is the uncertainty of arrivals and departures. For those who do not like to hurry with their meals there are the frequent stops, when one can linger over a reflective cigarette. For those who love the element of danger there is the mad race for the departing train, the breathless jump for the steps, the thrill of accomplishment in pulling oneself aboard. And for those of us who are still children at heart there is the excitement of sitting on the bottom step and watching the ground rush past only a few inches below our feet.

There is something divinely casual about it all. The engine jogs along thoughtlessly, living only for the moment. The car wheels bump, bump, together on the evenly laid rails. People sit on the steps smoking or reaching for the passing leaves. Others lean away out of the car windows "playing engineer," as Harry expressed it, in that delightful Continental fashion so much discouraged in America. And then in its own quiet little local way the train puffs into a station and sits there, panting gently over its recent exertion.

Now is the time for relaxation and play. A troop of children continue an interrupted game of tag, while their fathers and mothers are enjoying tea and cookies. The engineer and train crew enter a little game of craps (if there are Russian craps) or discuss the progress of civilization. Hungry and more adventurous passengers crowd about the long tables spread in the yard, where anxious village housewives are singing the praises and prices of their hot soup, roast chickens, hot bread, dill pickles, fruit, or kvas. Boiling water for tea is provided by the government, and there is usually a long line before the faucet, filling tin teakettles.

A bell rings three times. The conductor lights another cigarette and warms up the dice. The bell rings twice. Anxious mothers try to break up the tag game, by now uncontrollable. The bell rings once and the train starts moving. "Well," says a passenger, looking up disinterestedly, "we might as well get going." The race has begun. The last man on board is the winner; he can have the envied position on the steps.

It was a strange ride for us. The way led through a delightful valley, limited by low, grain-covered hills. Beyond them could be seen a line of mountains, rising white-capped above their golden yellow. To intensify the scenery a crowd of natives (Kurds without a doubt) sang or rather yelled weirdly in the car behind. At every station tall, bearded men in shaggy fur hats stalked majestically about, a whole arsenal of knives, six-shooters, and sporting rifles on or around them. We got out the ammunition when they first came moping near the train.

In our compartment were two upholstered shelves and a dirty table. "Soft class" this style was called, being one degree below wagon-lit and one degree above the comfort-standard for a good comrade. We looked forward to a soft-class night, but after going to bed we discovered why comrades prefer hard wooden benches to upholstery. "Horse feathers," muttered Pete, squirming and tossing and slapping. And then, "Damn it," all through the long night.

Unwelcome bunk-mates were soon forgotten next morning in the excitement of seeing a yurt for the first time. There it lay in a little hollow, a squatting hemispherical brown tepee. "And there," said Pete, "are the real Azerbaijeses. Greasy-looking bozos, aren't they?"

"Look on this side. Aren't those the Baku oil fields?" Harry pointed to a forest of tripods stretching for mile after mile over flat salt marshes and across barren brown slopes.

We followed that distant forest until the train swerved to the north and ran along a great body of water. The Caspian! The morning sun burned brilliantly on its sparkling waves. There, beyond the heart of that glittering water, was Turkestan.

Soon the train stopped at some sort of station, and a few people got off. "Where the hell is this?" We pulled out the map. There seemed to be no towns at all very near Baku. "Is this the place we get off?" asked Harry.

Pete was slightly skeptical. "I'm damned if I know. Let's toss and leave it to Fate and Steve Brody whether we've arrived. I don't see any other way of telling."

Finding out which side of the money was tails caused a considerable argument. At last Fate decided that we were to get off, and we barely managed it before the train pulled out toward Moscow. "Is this Baku?" we asked the first gentleman we met. He looked at us queerly. We expected him to say that it was Chewabitoff, but he only nodded disdainfully.

"Feidung!" came the familiar cry when we had passed through the station.

"Oh, by all means. We must have a feidung. It's too hot to walk, and we don't know where we are." The cab was driven by a fierce, walrus-mustached individual, who treated his bony horse as though it were a conquered enemy of his tribe. We drove through hot, dusty streets, passing old buildings and vacant, rubbish-heaped lots, to one of the town's two hotels. Only two hotels, in a town of three hundred thousand!

Being an oil town, Baku is not particularly attractive. Smoke and grease seem to fill the air, settling in thick black dust upon window sills, feidung seats and clean white shirt-tails. And yet an attempt has been made to render the place more attractive. Along the sea you can find little parks, gardens, squares, and beer tables, where throngs of people enjoy the coolness all day and all night; healthy, happy people, taking their simple pleasures from simple things.

Paul was off seeing the oil fields and the commercial side of the System, as a distinguished visitor should. The rest of the Expedition went on an extended tour of kvas stands. That day they learned to say with the supreme insouciance born of familiarity, "Daite kvase stakan, pajalsta" (Gimme a glass of kvas, please), and to toss with easy negligence the required five kopeks on the counter. It was a great day in more ways than kvas. With shirt-tails out in deference to the System, enjoying because of their ordinary appearance a well-nigh perfect freedom from popular notice, they wandered about, mixing with everyone and observing humanity in general and the female of the species in particular.

Here it is that one finds the beautiful women for which the Caucasus is famed, here in the shady parks along the glittering sea. Tall, browned, healthy-looking, they remind you of their life spent under unfading suns. In their proud walk they show passion, and fearlessness, and some of the soft sensuousness of the Oriental night; in their frank, open eyes you may read the new freedom of their recent emancipation. We noticed with regret the presence of lipstick and powder, contrasting vividly with their sun-tanned skins. Harry put forth an academic question. "Are they pretty because they paint, or do they paint because they are pretty?" Pete didn't know, and neither of us was enough of a critic to break the illusion and see what was underneath. "Well, it doesn't matter. I'd rather have one of these girls than a Ziegfeld beauty. These are so clean-looking." That was the word. Clean! Frank, open, calm, and proud. No sexy, underhand lure, no insidious, movie-actress come-hither about them. Instead, the grace and bearing of the thoroughbred. Oh, undoubtedly.

There was a long pier leading out from a little park, with an extensive building on the end of it. When it was found to be a bathing pavilion, we were all for it. The day was hot, and besides, we had been in every sea so far. They were selling tickets at a window, and the scale of prices was posted outside, ten differ prices for ten different things. We chose the most expensive tickets, on the assumption that a swim ought to be included, and entered the building. A fat, uniformed dowager showed us into a little room. Where was the sea? We wanted a swim. She returned in a moment, and told us to undress. But not us! We weren't going to part with our clothes before we found out what we were getting. It soon transpired, by numerous signs and motions, that we were getting a massage.

But we wanted a swim. "Swim," we told her. "Bath, wash, water, dive."

"Oh, ah," she said, and took our tickets away to change them. She came back. "Souda," she said, pointing at another room. We looked. It was a nice little room, and in the center of it stood a large, glistening bath-tub.

"Good Lord, let's get out of this! Can't we go in off the dock?"

"No, we can't, we've just got to make her get it." Harry got down on his stomach. "Look, swim. See." He started to perform a set of original and highly artistic setting-up exercises. The lady brought her friends, and soon the whole place was rolling with laughter and making no effort to understand.

Pete separated the dowager from her chuckling colleagues, and taking her firmly by the arm, led her outside on the pier. He pointed to the water. Then he pointed to himself. Then he adopted the official attitude of a diver and grunted. The woman stifled a sob and went off. At last we were shown into a private bath-house, with steps leading down to a little plot of water, scarcely six feet square, enclosed by a heavy spiked fence. "I guess we can get over that fence."

Swimming in the Caspian! Hadn't we read in our geographies that the Caspian was very salty, that it was impossible to sink, and that every one swam practically out of water? We climbed the fence gingerly, half afraid to dive. Splash! Two naked bodies hit together, and sank like stones to the muddy bottom. We came up gasping. It was hardly salty at all!

"Look at that," sputtered Harry. We swam swiftly out to the end of the pier, and into ring-side seats. On the right the girls were diving in, on the left the boys. Harry had one of his observations to make. "You notice that they have separated the ewes from the goats, while in Batoum everybody went in together. Is this separation of the sexes because the people are more primitive than at Batoum, or less communistic, or what?"

"I don't know about that." Pete's attention never wavered. It was the newness of the thing. We had been at Batoum only a week before. "But I do know why the geographies say that nobody sinks in the Caspian. They all swim high out of water so's to get a good sunburn."

Paul apparently was no swimmer, for we were unable to persuade him to go in with us; his mind was on higher things. He prevailed upon us to take in another concert after dinner, and so, like aristocrats, we took a feidung to the concert hall. It was a huge, open-air auditorium in a garden, reached through a marble-floored ex-palace. By the time the performance began they were selling standing room only, and crowds of people were strolling up and down the great porch overlooking the orchestra in an out-of-doors Paris Opera manner. Lights were low, the wind whispered softly through the trees, brilliant southern stars hung glowing in the warm sky, and the orchestra, with proper feeling, played the Liebestod from "Tristan."

"This is Europe," Harry said. "And it will get us if we don't move on. It may be very pleasant and all that, but we've got to get to Kashgar. The boat leaves to-morrow. I move that we wash our shirts for the last time, swear off shaving, and hit the sunrise trail."

We almost wavered from that stern resolution. We bought tickets to Krasnovodsk across the Caspian and were all ready to start, when in wandering among the kvas stands the next morning we discovered by chance a new delight. It was called Matzoni, and was a kind of hard sour cream eaten with sugar. We sat and ate plate after plate of it, in deep sympathy with Ulysses and the fruit of the lotus. We had never tasted anything like it before. It got under your skin, and worked its way insidiously through your very soul, until your whole being was enslaved.

Paul, as usual, found us and dragged us forth from our haze. "The boat leaves in an hour. We must be at the dock in plenty of time."

We were at the dock at four. The boat would not be in until five. All right, there was plenty of kvas to be drunk. Five o'clock came around, and we discovered that the boat was none other than the good ship *Karl Marx*. Was it mere coincidence that there was a strike on the ship of that name, and that it wouldn't be in for a few more hours? By six o'clock we learned that kvas is non-alcoholic. We sat down and watched our fellow passengers waiting at the dock.

There were fine-looking old ladies standing stiffly, severely, dispassionately, dressed in red coats covered with black and green figures, their heads held erect under immense silver-trimmed head-dresses, which set off the yellow pallor of their faces. Gigantic Mongols with fiercely bowed mustaches and thin fringes of beard lounged near them, fingering long curved knives and spitting expertly before them. Yellow Chinese in tall, massive hats strutted about, their long flowing robes majestically sweeping the floor, while their mousy little wives herded dirty children into a wailing pile, or nursed babies off in a corner. There were ragged Azerbaijanese in soiled gaudy skullcaps and a flowery pretense at a Russian shirt, mingling and chatting freely with their comrades: quiet, clear-eyed Russians in white, brown or blue blouses gathered in at the waist by a colored cord or by the usual thin leather belt. Out in the middle of the floor a woman was chewing bread and sausage and spitting the morsels into the mouth of her baby. A babel of tongues could be distinguished, the tongues of Asia from the Pacific to the Mediterranean, from the Arctic to the Indian; men with tongues, races, customs from every part of the continent, all sitting on baggage, lying on baggage, stretching out on blankets, chasing wayward children, munching on loaves of bread, laughing, talking; all with a single purpose: that of catching the boat.

By eight o'clock we had discovered that kvas could not possibly contain a drug, that cheese grew rancid very quickly, and that matzoni could produce a very bad stomach-ache. It wasn't until nine o'clock that we found the strike had been settled, and that *Karl Marx* would continue a leisurely schedule with us inside. We dumped our baggage into a square box with two wooden couches which was called a cabin, and went on deck to watch the ship sail.

"Pete, this is the beginning of *it!* That crowd on the dock and the Caspian, and this night!"

Pete leaned against the rail and looked out over the water, whispering to himself. "Astrakhan, Astarabad, Tabriz. Fergana—Enzeli. Aren't those wonderful names! To-morrow and after, we'll be there."

The lights of the great semicircle of Baku spread like a new moon of brilliance about us, enclosing us, its points piercing the black, sharp line of horizon to the east. Overhead, stars like lanterns flickered and burned, dimming the fading radiance of the shore. Slowly, imperceptibly, as the ship moved outward, the dark horizon widened, closing in with relentless sureness upon the bright crescent of the land, fusing single spots of light into yellow streaks, long streaks into a confused mass, the mass into a vague, red glow, which faded and faded and left only the blue-white stars. A warm wind sprang from the glow's dull remnant and the little ship began to sway softly.

"Dinner time," shouted Paul, a Swedish grin on his Swedish face.

"Darn it all!" muttered Pete. "Haven't you got a bit of romance in your whole make-up? You come busting up here on a night like this, babbling of food."

"Ah, but I have romance. Now there is no one to be romantic about, and the table is set."

"Well," said Harry as we reluctantly put our minds to material things, "I certainly sympathize with that honeymooning couple who were on the top deck. Her name is Sonia; I heard her called that when they said good-by to her." Sonia was a wild-looking creature, with a deliberate way of speaking and a firm shake to her coarse black hair. We all felt jealous of the man, until we saw the great blond Georgian's fierce-eyed Sonia tear bread and talk with it between her teeth.

Sonia may have paid us no attention whatsoever, but a couple of soldiers at the one long table glanced and whispered and consulted until we were thoroughly scared. To make matters worse the bearded Karl Marx glared down from the wall into the very souls of conscience-stricken opposers to his System. We felt guilty of something, we knew not what.

All the next morning those soldiers seemed to be on our trail. They kept materializing like the giants of our boyhood dreams. Stories of special spies filled our minds, and at lunch time Paul was the only unruffled member of the party. "I don't care. They can't interfere with me," he said. "I will do as I please." Sonia was still untamed, and talked breadily, so among the three of them we had a thoroughly uncomfortable time eating our borshch.

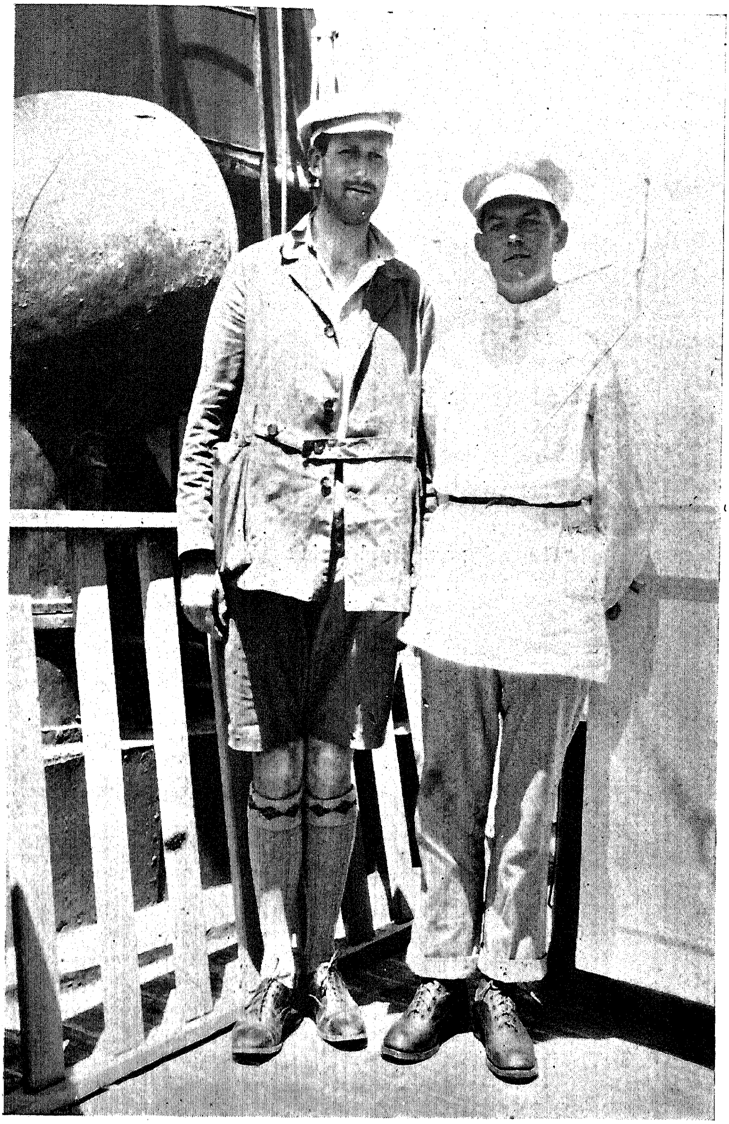
Crash! The table jumped, and hot soup slopped in our laps. We rushed outside. Bang! The ship jerked bumpily. A sailor was standing at the side with a pole. He pushed it down into the water. Yes, there was bottom. "Bottom," he shouted. We could have told him that without the pole. The wake was yellow with sand. Bump, bump! "There's the bottom," Pete exclaimed, "and there's a crab walking on it. Wonder if they think this is a canoe."

The ship increased her speed. A shallow bar loomed ahead. She tore at it, hit, slowed to a crawl, and slid over with a rending sound. Harry had been to sea, and he hardly approved. "Casual navigation, that. This used to be a czarist naval base; I wonder if it's ever been charted."

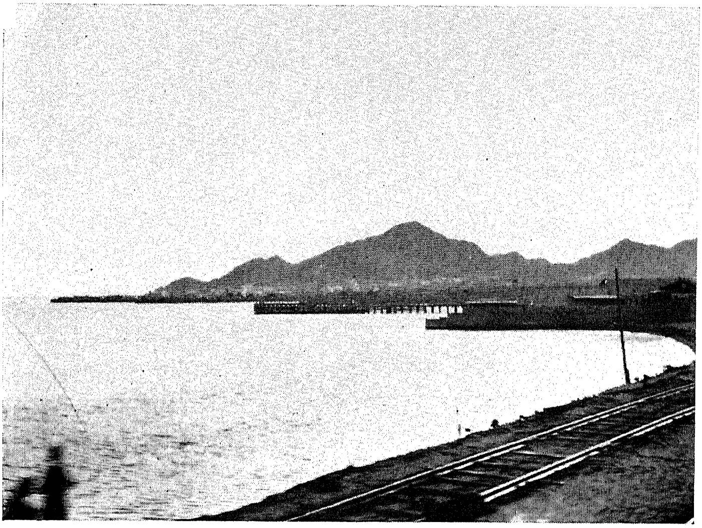
Pete had been to sea also, and he was laughing. "I guess the captain's got to have a little excitement now and then. Or maybe the quartermaster lost his Baedeker." No one seemed to mind much, and we slid into the big bay of Krasnovodsk without applause, except for a murmur from those seasoned passengers who had laid bets as to whether we should cross the bar or not.

A blinding sun beat down in an unbroken glare upon the treeless, bleak brown hills and hard-baked yellow flats which rimmed the bay. It beat upon the yelling mob of tall ragged porters on the dock, upon the noisy confusion of baggage, children, dust, costumes, and soldiers streaming down the gangplank, upon the long line of tottering, sweating humanity which straggled up the wide, hard-mud street and over the dazzling, choking plain to the station. It was low over the sea when our train was ready to start, and already the coolness of late afternoon had tempered its brassy heat to a dull, red warmth.

Paul managed to pick up a little German-speaking doctor from Askhabad, and so he bought the tickets, leaving Pete on the platform with the baggage. Paul and



The Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition



"The setting sun sloped against massive hills."

"Shaggy Turkomans stalked about." (*Page* 81)

Harry finished the negotiations, and came out to find no trace of Pete. Where he had been was a vast crowd of natives, all craning their necks at some object in the middle of them. Harry thought at once of a fight, and of Pete completely knocked out. He rushed into the mob, wildly. There sat Pete on a bag, a map spread over his knees, explaining to the multitude with appropriate gestures the intended itinerary of the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition, while wise men stood spellbound and wondered. They still speak of us at Krasnovodsk.

After we had finished six kvases and four matzonis the train started, moving along the shore. The contrasting yellow and brown of the bleak, rugged desert ended sharply in the brilliant blue water and the coppery sky. The setting sun sloped against massive hills, cutting their jagged heights with black shadows, which grew longer and longer, until the train veered sharply through them and the hills into the night. With the passing of the sun we were left with one candle to light our compartment—an example of the thoughtfulness of the government.

Paul had to leave us the next day at Askhabad. He had some sort of diplomatic business to finish, and could not continue with us. Good old Paul, a sterling gentleman and a perfect diplomat. It would be hard to get along without him. More than once he had been the saving of the expedition, and he had taught us many things in the art of diplomacy. What should we do without his gift of language? We gave him a big farewell dinner of bread, tea, cheese, and greasy rice cakes, bought at one of the stations, and toasted the success of his mission in brown, July kvas.

He did us one last service in his official capacity as interpreter. The little German doctor was full of gossip and advice, which Paul delivered to us. What could we eat? Anything at all. We remembered the sage advice of the nine American doctors whom we had interviewed: Eat no fruits nor vegetables unless cooked, drink no water unless boiled, no milk at all, no meat to speak of. Beware of dysentery, malaria, trachoma, typhoid, and bubonic plague. The German was inclined toward the pleasures of the table. "This is my only rule. I have lived in good health by it all my life in this country. Never eat melons before noon, and you will escape malaria. That is the only thing to fear in this land." For the rest of the summer we followed his teaching, depriving ourselves of melons for breakfast. We escaped malaria!

Paul had a wicked gleam in his eye as he related some of the fat little man's anecdotes. "He knows an American, a young writer, who went to the office of one of the big commissars to interview him. Bursting in, the American found the commissar making love to his secretary. Herr Doctor said that every commissar has a secretary!" Paul grinned. "He doesn't mind saying what he pleases about the System. He did say that the government is doing a lot for the heathen here, stamping out disease, educating, and exploiting."

But the police system was not doing much, apparently. The train guard swayed up to us, spouting Russian through his brown, straggly mustaches. He had a delightful way of winking one eye and laying a finger along his bulgy nose as he talked. He pointed to the window. "Zakroit." And so we shut it. We called the doctor in, and he explained that very often thieves came through the windows in the night. "Da, da!" grinned the guard, winking, and passing his finger across his throat. Thieves! Real robbers! Perhaps even bandits! We slept with window open and knives ready under our pillows, and we slept lightly, hoping. But no one even looked at us.

At Askhabad Paul got off. Some one saw him on the platform, dressed to the minute in a new hunting suit, with shiny brown riding boots and a soft London hat. "Speculant," that some one yelled. "Capitalist." The mob took up the cry. Paul was coldly disdainful. "To the devil with all Bolsheviks," he muttered to us, and walked out of our lives through the mob, beckoning proudly to his porter. There was no unbending, no compromising, no bowing to a country's customs about Paul. A Swede he was born, and a Swede he would be no matter where he was. The old diplomat! It would be hard sledding now.

"We have twenty minutes here, Pete. Let's look for kvas." We separated, sniffing for clues. Pete wandered off through the station. "Wow!" He jumped ten feet under the impact of a hairy hand. He whirled around. Was there a circus in town? There stood a being, seven feet tall, his giant size intensified by a black woolen shako three feet in diameter. About him was draped a long-sleeved, blanket cloak of a rusty brown color, gathered in at the waist by a faded, yellow sash. In the sash four wicked knives were thrust, and under his arm he wore nonchalantly a sawed-off shotgun. He leered, his high yellow cheek bones wrinkling evilly. A guttural laugh rumbled from a point behind the knives, and came forth far overhead flanked by straggly, brown, parenthetical mustaches. Pete laughed, a bit weakly to be completely in the spirit of the thing, and turned to see Harry coming up with a quart of kvas.

This sort of thing was getting on our nerves. It had happened too often to be a coincidence. It was becoming a habit. First, there was Norton's advice. Then the arrest in Batoum; the way those students had fingered their knives when Pete had mentioned the fate of Sacco and Vanzetti; the evil curiosity of the soldiers on the boat, whom we had now forgotten; the threat of thieves entering the car windows and cutting our throats; and now this fellow and his kind. It all fulfilled the wild tales we had heard of the dangers of traveling in Russia.

"Doesn't that begin to look fishy?" Harry suggested. "Here we've gone through all these dangers and perils and nothing has happened to us which could not happen in Centerville, New York."

"I think they're all playing up to us just to keep up their reputations," said Pete. "They always seem to laugh after they have scared us. From now on let's just give them their fun and take it as a huge joke. I bet all this talk about the Wild Sons of the Black Sands, and the Bloody Terrorism of the System is a lot of hooey, spread around so that Cook's Tours can hold a thrill for old ladies."

But the System seems to be coöperating with the natives in providing a reputation that would make the "opium dens" of New York's Chinatown green with envy. Harry bought a package of cigarettes, and came back shaking with excitement. "I've got something to show the folks at home. My aunt was right when she painted such a picture of the hated Reds. Look at this!" On the box were four flags, torn, tattered, drooping, but still recognizable. Over them in a sort of "Liberty enlightening the world" attitude, was the golden "pick and shovel" of the Communist seal, with the cryptic letters C.C.C.P. about it. The flags were those of England, France, Germany, and the United States.

"That's carrying the fun too far," Pete exclaimed very indignantly. "It's a personal insult."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" What were we? We calmed down after a while, but, in spite of our self-confessed broad-mindedness, the thing rankled.

"Even if we don't like the government, we can at least like the country. I feel like giving a lecture." Pete was in an expansive mood. It was a thrilling view which the train windows gave. The little railway trotted through the desert, a desert bounded to the south by lofty, dim, mountain ranges, to the north by the endless horizon. Occasional camels, real live camels, grazed among the dry shrubs, with no sign of the circus from which they might have escaped. Shaggy Turkomans stalked about sheep or horses, their woolly shakos suggesting the guard at Buckingham Palace, or they galloped dustily on tiny ponies with much flapping of robes. But these few signs of life were only rare flashes on the expanse of sun-baked, green-gray endlessness, stretching limitless beyond the vague horizon.

"Those mountains," said Pete, "are the western end of a range which reaches without a break to the Pacific. They include the Hindu Kush, the Himalayas, the Karakorum, and a few others whose names end in Shan. This desert you see to the north is the great Kara-Kum, or Desert of the Black Sand. There are three deserts which are spread across the map of Asia, and all of them occupy the same relative position north of this mountain range. The Kara-Kum is here, the Takla Makan is where we're going, above India, and the Gobi is east of that. Speaking of deserts, let me at that kvas bottle before you finish it."

"Gosh, Pete! Where did you get all this dope?"

"While you were frittering around with girls on the boat I was learning things. You should apply your time to better advantage."

"Oh, shut up! You didn't come in so early at night, either. Go ahead with the story."

"On your right you see the mountains and the border of Persia. Over there is Meshed, the holy city of the Moslems, and Nishaipur, where Omar used to live. On the left, if you could see that far, is Khiva, where Tamerlane had an awful fight. Khiva is on or near the Oxus River, which used to flow into the Caspian but which now goes into the Aral Sea. We followed the old bed for a while last night. Now they call it the Amu Darya. We'll cross it before we get to Bokhara."

"Gee, you certainly know your stuff. But if that's the Oxus, where is the other river that goes with it? You know, when you think of Oxus you think of the other one, just like ham and eggs, or corned beef and cabbage, or frankfurters and sauerkraut."

"You mean the Jaxartes. That's now the Syr Darya; it flows into the Aral too, further east.

"This strip of land, between the Syr and the Amu, is the bloodiest piece of country in the world. All kinds of races have lived here, and all have spent their time in fighting. It has never been quiet, not even when some big fellow like Tamerlane or Genghis Khan has held it. Revolutions happen at any minute, and they aren't just Mexican revolutions, with a few people killed and a new president. They are fights until somebody is wiped out. This place makes the Balkans look like a sick dog scrap."

"It's quiet now, isn't it?"

"Well, pretty near. They just finished up a Holy War, and they are sitting tight until they can think up a new one. You don't hear about 'em much, but they're here."

"I hope we see something."

"Oh, we'll see plenty in Bokhara and Samarkand. In fact, everywhere we go, something has happened. We pass right up beyond the headwaters of these two rivers on our way to Kashgar, along the line of some of the richest cities of Asia. Genghis Khan followed this line when he came from the other direction."

Harry repeated something softly, something which sounded like a chant. "Batoum, Tiflisi, Baku; Karasnovodski, Merv—Say, what do you know about Merv?"

"It used to be the capital of the Persian empire. We get there to-night, pretty late. Too bad we can't stop."

"Yeah." Harry went on with his murmuring. "Merv, Bokhara-a-a—"

CHAPTER SIX

THE DEAD HEART OF ISLAM

Samarkand is a jewel on the face of this earth,
But Bokhara is the Heart of Islam.

Ancient Proverb

WHEN Genghis Khan rode his horse into the Great Mosque of Bokhara and faced the assembled mullahs and scholars, he faced also the whole tradition of Islam and the accumulated erudition of ages. But this rough Mongol cared not for libraries and scholars and wise men; his concern at the moment was the feeding of his Horde. "I am the Wrath and the Flail of Heaven," he said, and he was believed.

He sacked and destroyed the city, but he could not destroy the tradition. A century and a half later Tamerlane returned to Bokhara her former splendor, and once more she flourished as the center of civilization. For a while her bloody past was forgotten. Learned men from the Mohammedan world flocked to her universities to study the Book that is to be Read.

From the beginning of time she had been a university town, passively accepting her unavoidable fate, producing calm, ascetic thinkers rather than mighty warriors. Founded by that great Persian, Efrasiab, she already had a history when Alexander conquered her and the world. Placed in the center of that bloody strip of land between the Oxus and the Jaxartes, she was tossed, unresisting, between nomads, Persians, and Arabs. She reached her height after Tamerlane. Then Uzbeks and Kirghiz began her downfall.

But the tradition was still clung to, with the stubborn archaism of the Faithful. She was always "High, Holy, Divinely Descended Bokhara." Even after the emir fell under Russian rule she remained as one of the Holy Cities. Her merchants were rich, her universities welcomed zealous students from the whole of Transcaspia and Fergana. No unbelieving Jew could ride in the streets. Strangers were not wanted. The old was zealously guarded by mullah and merchant alike, and complex modernity was carefully outlawed.

When the Soviets drove out the last emir, Bokhara foresaw her fall in the rising march of industrialization. The Mussulman tradition would be exterminated. Feverishly and furiously a Holy War was fought against the white unbelievers, a war to retain Bokhara and what she stood for in her place in the early Middle Ages. For six years the war dragged on, and echoes still are heard in the hills. But Bokhara passed with the tradition, and left a squalid, mud-brick city, which modern Communism is vainly trying to industrialize. The past remains in the dead buildings and the romance which still clings mysteriously to them.

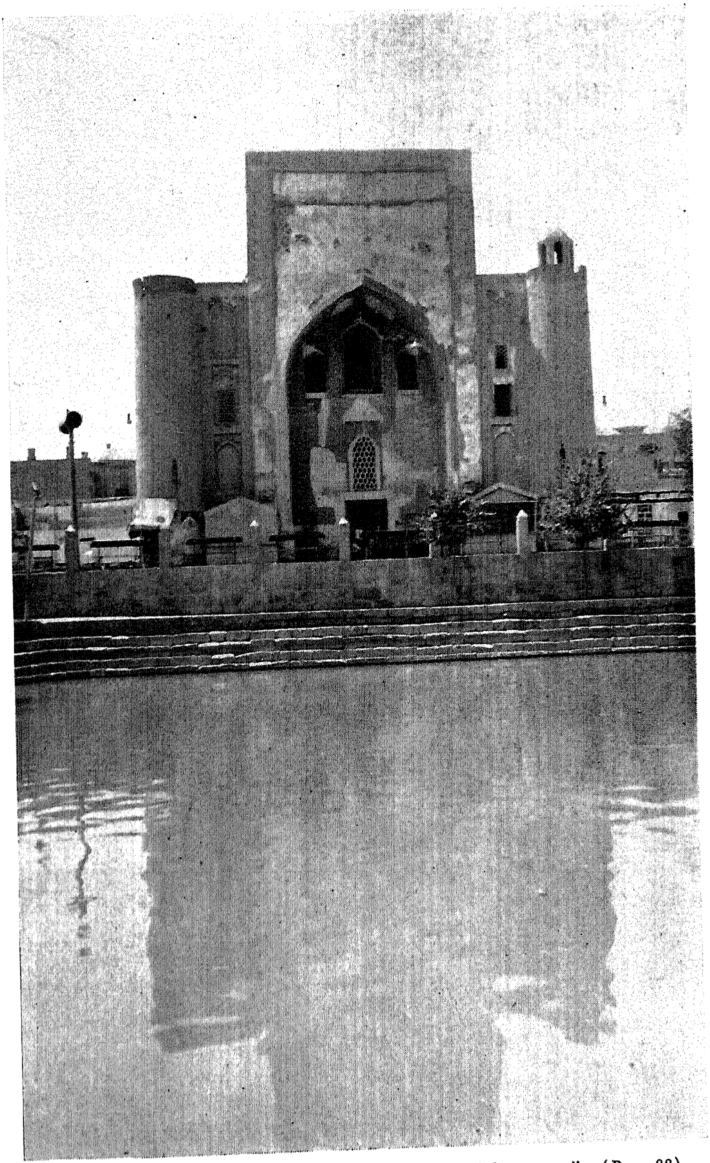
As we sat in the dinky little train which runs from Kagan on the main line to Bokhara, we were filled with mingled excitement and dread. Would the old Bokhara be there, the city Matthew Arnold's imagination describes in his "Sick King in Bokhara"? Or had the Bolsheviki destroyed those

Houses, arcades, enamell'd mosques,
. . . orchard closes,
Filled with curious fruit-trees brought from far,
With cisterns for the winter-rain?

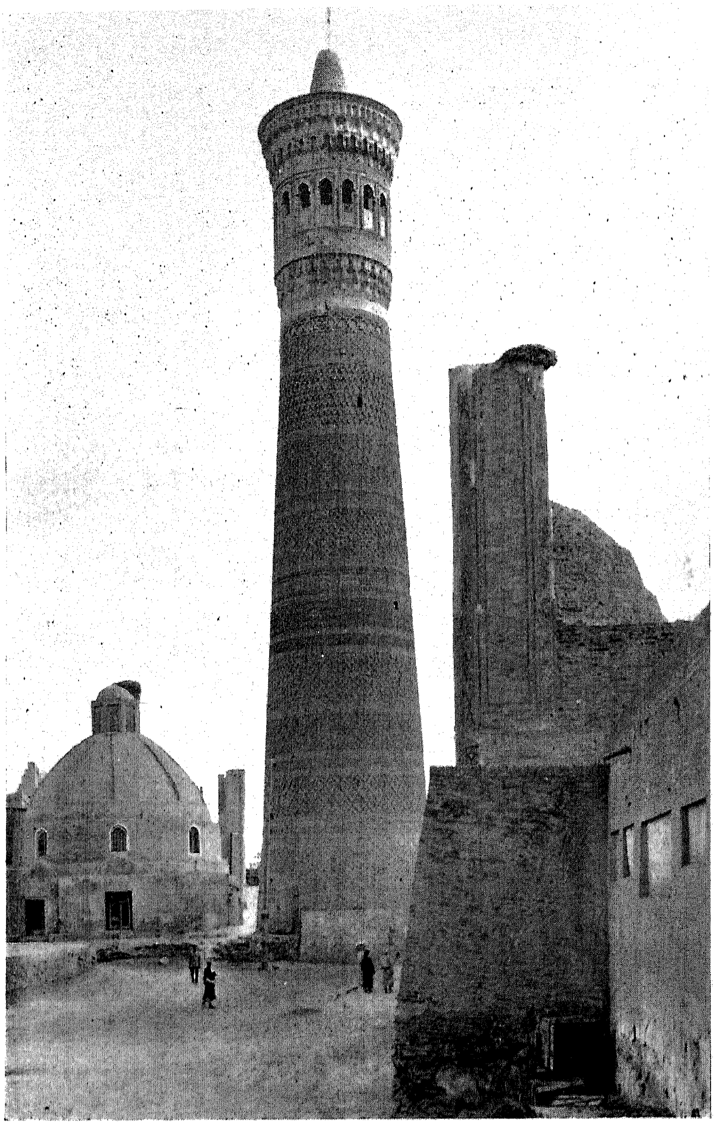
There are no kings now, not even sick ones; Jew, Mohammedan, and Russian are equal free citizens on the city streets; women are beginning to unveil their faces and their religion; the mosque schools where small boys squatted and recited the Koran are closed. We knew that. What was left?

The orchards and grain-covered fields of irrigated farm land were passed, as we violently hoped that to-day, at last, we could feel some of the mystery of the real East at first hand. When we found ourselves on the wide, wall-lined street leading to the city gate, we discovered it, and discovered that Bokhara, in spite of drastic modern changes and feverish industrialism, is, and always will remain, Bokhara, "High, Holy, Divinely Descended."

From the simmering heat of the sun-baked ground rose the city wall, its serrated top passing through clusters of houses far on both sides. It was broken before us by two round turrets, which flanked the narrow arch of the main gate. Through this gate moved a riot of color, of motion, and of strangeness. Tiny, mouse-colored donkeys trotted along placidly, bearing fat, bearded natives bigger than they: natives in long rusty dressing gowns and peaked, black-trimmed, white hats, whose booted legs dangled lazily at each jerk. Small, white ponies plodded droopily, carrying the stiff, blue-cloaked figures of women veiled by dingy squares of black, which reached from their heads to their horses' backs in an unbending, flat



"Wide steps around the pool led . . . to a beautiful mosque." (*Page* 88)



"The Tower of Death. An emir built it seven centuries ago." (*Page* 93) surface. Short yellow men with scanty beards and close-set skullcaps; tall, brown men with high-bridged noses and white, many-folded turbans; water carriers dexterously spraying the dust from goatskins on their bent backs; lean young boys affecting brilliant, embroidered shirts and gold-trimmed hats perched on the backs of their heads; blue-shirted workmen smoking cigarettes and chatting seriously among themselves; all wove in and out of the stream of feidungs, droshkies, big-wheeled drays, and oxcarts which passed and repassed through that gaunt gray arch.

To follow the crowd through the gate was to leave a world of light, of heat, of brilliant, dazzling yellow, and to enter the dark, cool shade and the sudden fall of dusty grayness formed by long rows of thick trees and by the muddy brooks which lined the road. Low hovels of straw-brick opened wide their black interiors under the tree branches resting on their thatched roofs. Other trees arched over the high unwindowed walls of houses, blank save for a battered front door; trees filled with birds singing the delights of the gardens below them. The path led past walls broken by shop fronts, and narrow cross streets where dirty little boys played in the clay; across bridges, and uneven mounds, and sudden bright flashes of sunlight; and over all was the monotony of the gray dust and the hard mud. Then suddenly would appear a little rock-edged pool shrouded in a grove, where a woman washed clothes, or where a few naked children splashed noisily in the muddy waters.

Without the slightest warning the dark path burst upon the blinding light of a wide square. A broad, twostoried structure reared its height in a row of double arches, gaunt, empty, falling to ruin, but still colorful in the pale blue and yellow mosaic which crumbled from its walls. A mass of droshkies clustered before it in the hot sun. To one side tattered awnings shaded raised platforms, where a crowd of native loiterers squatted, elbows on knees, drinking tea, eating fragments of tough bread, talking shrilly and monotonously, or swaying gently to the rhythm of pipes and balalaikas played in weird semitones of unmelodious music. Others more industrious sat tailor-fashion among heaps of wares, offering harness, dried fish, copper ware, and gourds to the kaleidoscopic crowds.

We strolled across the square toward the building. We turned and stared at the natives squatting seriously at their tea. A grimy young fellow in a dulled-green robe spat disdainfully in our direction. A tall gentleman stalked by with a load of tough, flat cakes on his head. Then an old man, bent and weary, offered us an armful of shoelaces, draped over a faded red sleeve. We saw a yellow, round-faced boy with his arms about a pile of melons, wrapped in a purple cloth. A white-turbaned beggar stretched piteous hands at us from the shade of a tea platform; another lay curled up on a rug eating half a melon in noisy gulps.

Again the glare was shut out and the cool, gray dusk took its place, as we passed to one side of the crumbling palace, and stepped down to a large, tree-shaded pool, where dusty branches of age-old trunks interwove three sides in a thick, green mat. Directly opposite, a row of wide steps around the pool led from the water to a beautiful mosque, where a single large arch was divided within into four smaller arches, all flanked by round towers. Other buildings of similar architecture lay behind the trees about the pool. It was only when you looked closely that you noticed the crumbling ruin of the blues and browns on their tile-covered sides.

We sat for a while on the steps above the water, and then wandered about the pool, the holy pool of Bokhara, called Father of Waters. We passed a little garden filled with tables, where dim flowers struggled vainly in the hard-packed mud. Harry cleared his throat apologetically. "It's a hot day, Pete. I'm a little thirsty." He blushed, slightly ashamed of himself. "Do you think we might have some—beer?" He uttered the last word tentatively.

"All right," Pete murmured, gazing dreamily across the water, and dazedly we sat among the flowers, sipping slowly, staring at rug sellers, beggars, and indolent natives squatting or lying under the ancient branches.

Those trees had seen Uzbeks, Kirghiz, and Russians march victorious beneath them when they were almost as hoary as they are now. In tall, strong, middle age they had watched the city being tossed from nomad to Persian, to Arab, to Mongol. During the prime of their youth they had shaded the struggling mobs of warriors which shifted from revolution to bloody revolution. Perhaps as young saplings they could remember the great Persian Efrasiab who might have planted them, and the triumphant entrance of Alexander, coming suddenly like a storm from the West. Countless generations of young students had passed beneath those branches on their way to the colleges of Islam. Now they ranged in regretful slumber about the pool-centered square, testifying mutely with the crumbling ruins to the departed glory of the city.

This holy city had known its existence long before Christ, had felt again and again the iron heel of the conqueror, had welcomed victorious Tamerlane, had sent forth into the world fierce-eyed converts to Islam, and bearded mullahs with the Truth. Now there was nothing left of that glory but the battered old trees, gray dust, and the faded red Soviet star on the top of the palace opposite.

Harry sighed deeply. There was too much of it. And it was so completely different from anything he had seen before. "Tamerlane, and Genghis Khan, and Efrasiab." Pete said nothing, heard nothing, paying no attention to Harry's feeble murmurings. Words were too meager to describe the majesty of dead glory which filled that quiet cool square. The little common flickerings of everyday life went on, life that was but a thin ghost of its former greatness. Water carriers trudged down the worn stone steps and filled their goatskins from the holy pool. Natives yawned, stretched, slept, or slouched slowly by in a thin stream. A rug seller haggled over a price. Veiled women passed. We joined them and entered the maze of roofed streets that made up the bazaars.

Here all was motion, the motion of the gayly dressed throngs weaving among the oxcarts, of buyers fingering prospective purchases, of turbaned merchants sitting crosslegged, sipping tea. Little stalls set back in the wall lined the way, showing brilliant flashes of color through the restful darkness. Food of all kinds hung on strings or sizzled in pans, mingling greasy odors with the smell of animals, dirt, and that strange Oriental crowd-smell which is so impossible to describe. The merchants stared passively before them, surrounded by their heaped-up wares.

There was naas, the green snuff of the natives, a smooth, wide pyramid of it. Quaint silver ornaments hung temptingly, or were displayed in glass cases, while a small boy hammered out new ones from lumps of metal, and from the coins of the Czar Nicholas. There were shawls from Persia and rugs from the city factories; silken gowns of bright embroidery and little gold and red skullcaps; sheepskins from the steppes, copper kettles from far-off Armenia, and wooden bowls made by the Kirghiz. If you showed an interest in his wares, a brown-eyed merchant sometimes brought out from his sash a blue cloth, which he unwound to disclose a tumbling heap of unset jewels, many of them carved and decorated. And if you were still interested he might show you the prize of his collection, an uncut diamond, or a long, knobby, amber necklace, or a carved red talisman.

Pete tried to remember the word "economy" but forgot it at the sight of a heap of gorgeous silken scarfs. "I just can't resist that. Even if our bank-roll is small, I'm going to dissipate." We approached the stall and watched the merchant perform, spreading before us thin, fine draperies which floated tenuously and softly to the floor. He picked up a fragment six feet square and pulled it easily through a silver finger ring.

"I'm sold on that," said Pete. "It's like one of those fairy-tales, where the king sent his three sons out to get some cloth that would go through his ring. You know, the youngest son always got it and the princess."

"All right," Harry agreed to the purchase. "But how are we going to buy it? Didn't some one tell us that we had to haggle over prices, and that we ought to offer half what was asked?"

"Yes, but this thing is only four rubles. I hate to gyp the guy. Well, I'll offer him two."

Pete did so. The merchant very gravely pulled out a card, on which were printed the standard prices set by the State. He looked mournfully at us, and murmured, "Four rubles."

We bought six scarfs, each one more vivid than the last, and folded them up in our pocketbooks, passing on to the next wonder. "I know why they set those prices," volunteered Harry. "They say it takes two Greeks to beat a Jew in a deal, and two Jews to put it over an Armenian. What would be the chances of a poor, simple Comrade against that combination?"

The cool gloom of the bazaars opened suddenly upon a deserted square, where a golden yellow mosque reared its lofty height in a mass of crumbling tile; immense carved doors swung crazily on rusty hammered hinges, disclosing a glimpse of a roofless court within, piled with fragments of turquoise mosaic. A dirty, white-clothed beggar sat before it winding about his calloused feet the rags which served him for shoes. We turned back to the dark streets, making in the general direction of a turreted tower which peeped over the domes.

Pete cleared his throat. "That tower is very interesting. It is called the Tower of Death. An emir built it seven centuries ago close by that mosque where he went to church. The delightful practice in those days was to lead everybody of doubtful repute to the top." We came upon an open plain, surrounded by a confusion of blue domes and ruined palaces. The round smooth minaret rose like a lone tree from their midst.

"Well," said Harry, leaning backwards to get a good view of the top. "Well, what did they do with them then?"

"The muezzin would call the faithful to prayer. As they gathered for worship they would automatically leave a little space clear on the ground about here." He pointed around the tower. "That was so that when the emir's soldiers practised the giant swing, nobody below would get hit."

We walked on up a steep hill, where an old fort of mud brick tottered in ruins, and saw the whole wide, fertile valley of the Zarafshan surrounding the ancient city with a limited circle of green. Within the circle the gray-brick city wall began at our very feet and swung, ever widening, about the jumbled confusion of flat roofs and glistening blue domes and that mass of roofed bazaars. About the circle the brown desert shimmered off into space, but by a thin swath of green-bordered river, which blended as it ended with the hazy, brown sands. "It looks," said Pete, feeling the heat, "like a drawing in a biology book of the inside of an egg; all concentric circles with two little curlicues on the ends."

"My Gosh!" exclaimed Harry. "After that we'd better go back and get some beer. You seem to need it."

Once more we sat in the shade beside the main pool, and watched a few photographers taking pictures of pretty young Uzbek maidens with their best boy friends in a typical Coney Island manner. An old lady came up to us, bent, limping painfully, her wrinkled face gray and flabby. She said in Russian, "How has your grandmother been since I last saw her?" or perhaps, "It's a nice day if it doesn't rain." We looked as dumb as we were. She tried it in German, and so we parried with French, "We are American." Her lips parted and she smiled, disclosing two long brown teeth in her upper jaw which intermeshed into the spaces in the lower. "I also, I speak French. You are really American? How I am happy to see you!"

We bowed, somewhat astonished. She went on. "Since ten years I have not spoken the language. Pardon me, if you please, if I have forgotten how to speak." She rambled on. "I, I was a governess in the family of a prince of Petersburg. I came to Russia from Paris, my city. I became a Russian citizen. I spoke very well the French, the German, the Italian, the Spanish. But now, I forget. It is ten years that I have not spoken the French. You will pardon me if I forget." The poor old creature curtsied, with a remnant of grace and dignity. "Before it, we were very rich. We had a large house, and many servants. All was ease and luxury and cultivation. The society was the most delightful." Her voice fell to a whisper. "I do not wish any of them to hear me speak to you in French. And I do not wish them to hear what I say. When they punish, mon dieu, it is terrible. I cannot describe. When it came, I was sent to Bokhara; I, my two sons, my daughter, and my baby girl. My husband, they took him. He was officer for l'Empereur." She wiped a tear from her red-rimmed eye. "This is my son, he who takes photographs for his living. He is married. My other son, he is in the railroad at Kagan, as baggageman. He is all that I have to give me bread. There are six mouths for the bread, and I, I am very sick. I will not be here much longer. He has only his salary, fifty-two rubles a month. You imagine that, fifty-two rubles for a month to feed six." She began to break down. But then she pulled herself together and smiled. "This is my little baby." She brought up a pretty little aristocrat of a pigtailed girl, about twelve. "But you can have no idea what it is like, you with that great country of yours. I would like you to tell your countrymen about me, but alas, I am not alone. There are thousands in my case through the world. I could not escape from these—but I must not speak to you more. Some one might see me. When they punish, mon dieu! I dare not."

We tried to be fair to the System, as we rode back to the mainline station that evening. We tried to be broad-minded, we tried to tell ourselves that in any great upheaval the few must suffer. We did our best to look at the matter from a sociological point of view. After all, the individual does not count, when the development of the race is at stake. Nature's law has ever been that those opposed to any great changes must be eliminated. But always before our eyes arose the vision of that face, so aged by suffering, so bitter against things as they are; that body, bent and racked by disease and poverty and hunger. She, who had known the light and gayety, the wit and scintillation of sophisticated court life, was forced to bury herself in the heat and dust of dead Bokhara. Dead Bokhara? What she stood for was dead, too. The new order cared only to annihilate the old, and she and Bokhara must suffer. In a few short years she would be forgotten, overwhelmed by the new Age. Would Bokhara itself be lost and forgotten?

"Oh, well," said Pete, "let's think of more cheerful things. We're going to Kashgar, you know. Look at that filthy Uzbek kid tormenting those clean little girls." A crowd of urchins were playing with the dirtiest kid in the world, snatching his torn cap, throwing it at the girls, and making him run at them to get it. With a fiendish light in his eyes and his grimy paws outstretched, he succeeded several times in brushing past their clean white dresses and scaring them. One of the girls drew herself up and stared him away, as if to say "These strays!"

The new Bokhara, full of strays, clean Russian children, modern factories, labor unions, and atheism.

"Samarkand will be different," said Harry. "We'll be tooting up the Golden Road in a howdah, and there won't be any Communism." Samarkand, the mythical city of blue, the Rome of Asia, where Alexander rested, reveled, and slew his foster-brother Clitus in a fit of anger, where the Great Khan quartered his Mongol Horde, where Tamerlane built and planned new earths to shake! We bought our tickets with a tremor of excitement. To-morrow was new and strange, to-day was over. But our sleep that night was vaguely troubled by dreams of a poor old aristocrat and a noble city, whose birthrights had been lost.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROME OF ASIA

"Beer, *beer,* BEER!" said the private.
"Merry, merry men are we.
For there are no men that can compare
With the—Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition."

To many benighted Americans the name Samarkand means nothing. To others it is a symbol of all "those subtle forces with which the Orient ensnares the fancy of the Occident, as a woman ensnares the fancy of a man," as one gentleman put it (he was tight at the time). There is also a more definite impression, something about "The Golden Road to Samarkand" and some connection or other with Russian restaurants or night clubs.

Before we had seriously considered visiting this city, we placed ourselves in the night club class. After we had read a bit on the subject, we had a weird, beautiful impression of the place. "The beggars wear silks and the whole town is built of blue stone. The place is just loaded with gems, studded in the masonry," Pete had related with a gleam of adventure in his eye. And to-day we were to see that of which we had dreamed.

But the whole thing started off badly. First there was that night on the train, with the cramped, bone-aching sleep on a five-foot hard-wood shelf. "Hard class," they call this, and it is well named. The mob of puling, wauling native babies in the single-compartment car did not add much to the gayety of the occasion. And then the fight through the station, and the smells, and the dirty crowd. Last of all came the real disappointment.

"Is it not passing brave to be a king," Harry quoted, attempting to recapture the mood, the only mood for Samarkand. "Is it not brave to be a king, Entreches or whoever it was, and ride in triumph through Persepolis?" We would go up that Golden Road in triumph, riding to the home of Tamerlane in the glory to which he was accustomed. A howdah? Well, at least a camel would bear us. We walked out through the yard onto the street and found, awaiting to bear us along that road—an automobile bus!

It was a long hot ride, and certainly not in the least triumphal. We didn't notice very much about it, except that everyone shouted something like "Yes!" when wishing to alight. "Yes?" For heaven's sake, did they speak English? Shady, poplar-lined streets contributed to the impression that we were in Pasadena. Or perhaps Hollywood, the Mecca of all yes-men. Some time later we were told that this is a Russian word which means "Here, there, there is, there are, what have you?" and a number of other things. In this instance it meant: "Please stop the bus. I want to get off!"

We were not in Hollywood. The throb of drums reached us from ahead. This was something like it! We passed rows of native tea-houses, raised platforms shaded by bushy locust trees and smothered by rich carpets. So this was the Golden Road! Not too golden, thank you! Squatting natives were served with tea in bowls, tough cakes, and the weird noises that pass for music, natives in the by now familiar long-sleeved cloaks and red and gold skullcaps. That was the only gold; on the native caps, and on the "pick and shovel" of the Soviet flag which floated from so many of the buildings. "That's not a pick and shovel," said Pete indignantly, "That's a hammer and a scythe." "I don't care what it is. Look at the darned thing in Samarkand, of all places."

"Everybody off," shouted the bus driver. At least he said "Yes!" but we knew he meant, "This is the end of the line." We looked about us. Where were the blue palaces, the silk-clothed beggars, the gem-studded domes? We cursed the heat and looked for beer. We couldn't stand this. Samarkand, which we had come so far to see, nothing but a bunch of dirty mud huts, howling natives, and no beer! Blue city, indeed! All was gray and beerless.

"I'm going to have the satisfaction of making up some fine stories to tell the boys," Pete muttered despondently. "If this is what we've come for I'm going to get drunk, if they have it."

Harry glanced to the left. He grabbed Pete's arm. Pete looked. Neither of us spoke. A strange excitement seized us, sudden, intense, the excitement that can be aroused only by violent beauty. There, staring us in the face, were three buildings.

Pete was the first to come out of the daze. He thought of his camera. Click! he had captured an impression of the dream. But not uncontested. An old mullah dashed up, his face livid with wrath. Photographing these holy places! Unbelievable, except of those dogs of infidels! He began to spout. We tried to ignore him, but he insisted. We brushed him off, only to have him come back buzzing.

He seemed to want us to follow him. "Now listen here, old man. We haven't the time to bother with you now." Upon hearing a strange language, he renewed his efforts, even attempting force. Out of sheer boredom we gave in, and he took us across the great central square into the very presence of the chief of police.

That fierce gentleman was surprised when we asked for permission to photograph. In fact he was so surprised that he gave the necessary permission without thinking twice. Apparently very few had asked for that in his long experience. When we told him we were tourists he refused to believe us. Tourists never came to Samarkand.

The mullah wasn't through yet. He burst into a torrent of mouthy words. We supposed he was insisting upon our arrest. The police captain nodded and spoke to him very gently. The mullah grinned evilly.

When we had ushered ourselves out of the presence, we understood why he had grinned. He had persuaded the official that we wanted him, him, the noisy spitting fool, as our guide, and the chief, wishing to please such distinguished guests, had agreed. What was even worse, the mullah didn't care a rap whether we took pictures of Mohammed himself; all he wanted was a few paltry rubles which we would have gladly paid him to stay away.

He was conscientious at any rate. He took us to see every single building of note in the whole city. His Russian was about as limited as ours, and he knew most of the words that we didn't, so the sights passed with a name and a date for the most part.

We stood there in the center of the great square, which was surrounded by four buildings. "Reguistan," spat the mullah, pointing to the cobblestones beneath our feet. "Old, very old. Two thousand years." We doubted his arithmetic, but thrilled at the thought of it. On this market place the great conquerors of Asia had probably celebrated their triumphs. Tamerlane no doubt had sent his steward many times to buy melons for breakfast from melon merchants no different in face and costume from those over there who were tying the juicy yellow fruit in rushes. Lord Timur could eat melons for breakfast; he feared neither man nor microbe. Perhaps one of the Great Khan's ruthless Mongols had taken a rug from that merchant's ancestor to show to his black-haired wife back in Karakorum.

"Russian! New! Politic!" said the mullah, squinting at the long, low building where we had met the police. He led us toward it to get the effect of what was coming. "There." He pointed left, center, right, to these three great structures which formed the three other sides of the market place, "Ulug-Bek, Tilya-Kare, Shir-Dor. Old. Five hundred years. Madrasahs."

"Madrasahs?" we asked, not daring to look.

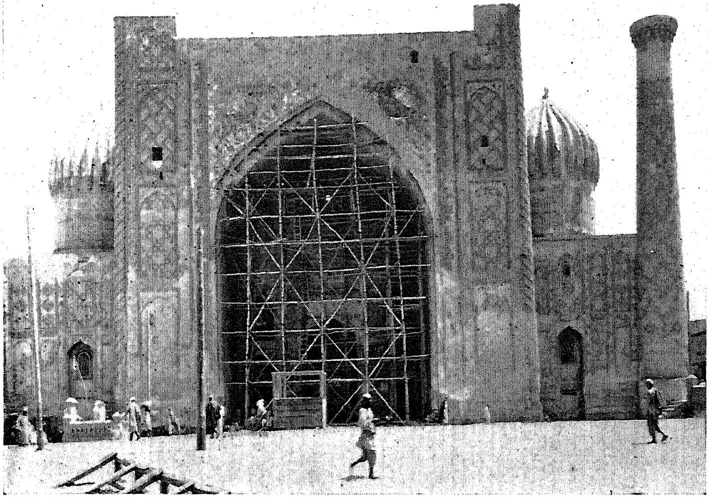
The mullah wiped his mouth on his long, dirty brown sleeve. "University. College. Ulug-beg, Tamerlane's grandson. Astronomy and mathematics. Very famous."

The effect is a riot of beauty, sheer beauty of symmetry, of color, of design. It is the color which one sees at once, color splashed majestically with a certain order. Brilliant turquoise and pale gold blend in the whole with a brown and pink harmony, dazzling and numbing.

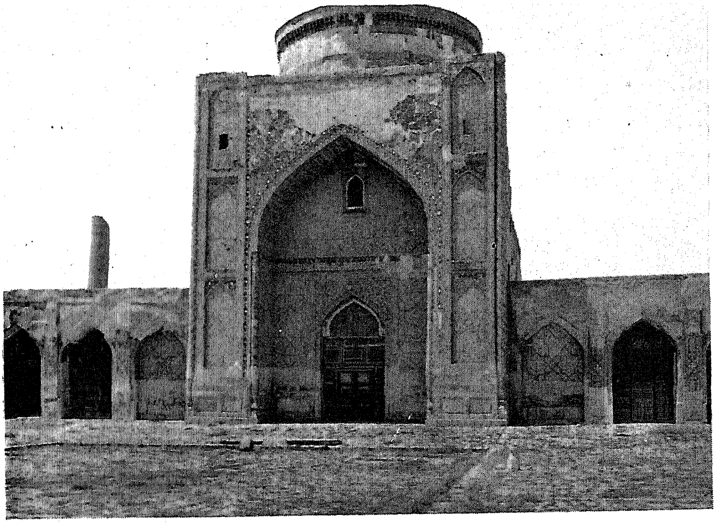
It is only after you get used to the color that you notice the buildings themselves, each of the same order, but each with a special individuality. Tall, round pillars of blue and yellow form the flanks. Broad, octagonal towers half as high enclose a deep-pointed, many-arched porch. In the very center is a massive doorway set in one immense arch. Over façade, arches, porch, towers, and pillars are the tiles, turquoise on yellow, gold on blue, pink on brown, in a disordered regularity.

Then only by drinking deeply and more deeply of the indescribable beauty do you see the little things; that the tall pillars are slightly inclined, that one of the buildings has pointed, turbanlike domes; that the gorgeous blue tile over that arch is Arabic script. And when you are surfeited with beauty so that you can bear no more you become aware that the tiles are chipping in many places; that a pillar has fallen here, and that one is held upright only by an unsightly tangle of ropes; that the carving on the doors is cracked and broken. You walk through those doors and you find within immense courts, porches, arches, enamel, all in the splendor of ruin. To complete the picture there is the infrequent washing of the few indigent natives who profane with their presence those porches where once the minds of the age discussed world-important problems.

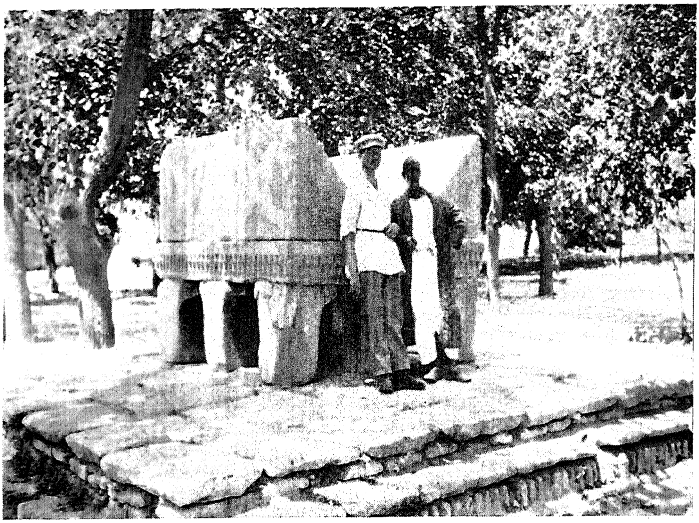
With an effort we tore ourselves away, only to be captured by new loveliness at every turn. Mosques, madrasahs, palaces, and tombs were visited in bewildering confusion, majestic in tottering ruin, colorful in design, perfect in architecture. One in particular stands out. "Gur-Emir," the mullah told us, his voice reverent for the first time. He showed us a huge arch leading to a dome-



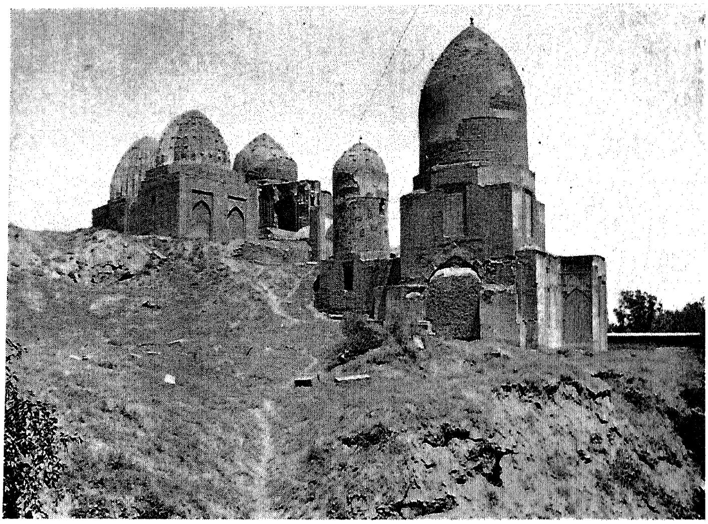
"Sheer beauty of symmetry, of color, of design." (*Page* 101)



"You find within immense courts, arches, enamel."



"A huge lectern for the Koran."



"Hazret Zindeh . . . a cluster of little domes." (*Page* 105) covered chapel, both fallen in places but preserving some semblance of former glory. "Tamerlane sleep." He pointed to the tiled design in the arch. "Mayalik. Italian." By "mayalik" he meant majolica. He turned to the outer covering. "Mosayik. Chinese." Combined in the tomb of the Earth-Shaker is the craftsmanship of the two ends of his earth, in the architectural design of his own race. And of the earth that he shook there is left a ruined arch and a cracked dome and a pile of scattered blue tile to cover him.

We should have paid the Conqueror the proper homage; we should have stood in silent prayer and meditation while we thought of his glory; we ought to have done lots of things which we remembered later, but the old man wanted to finish his job as unsentimentally and as speedily as possible. He hurried us on, showed us a huge lectern for the Koran cut from a single cleft block of marble ten feet long, and then took us up a perilous climb inside one of the ruined towers of the mosque of Bibi-Khanum, built by Timur for his Chinese wife.

A vista of progress lay before us. The mullah pointed to a barren low mound in the distance. "Maracanda. Old Samarkand. Three thousand years." He swept his arms about us, over the arches and colleges and ruins. "Not old Samarkand. Thousand years." He pointed to an expanse of tree-shaded avenues and whitewashed houses in the far distance. "New Samarkand." The three cities! In three thousand years.

Alexander was her first recorded conqueror. He dropped out of the west, reveled, pillaged, destroyed, and passed on to India. He left behind him a faint streak of Hellenic culture, which remains, twenty-three centuries later, in the Greek coins and vases occasionally unearthed on the mound of Maracanda.

A thousand years later came the Arabs, bringing a high civilization to the then ancient city. Genghis Khan swooped down with his Horde from the east, massacred the inhabitants; but he, the Mongol Khan, who burnt and razed cities without a thought, seems to have spared her proud walls and magnificent buildings. He laid waste the countryside, but he left the city untouched.

Tamerlane made her his capital. He built and rebuilt, bringing master craftsmen from all over the known world to satisfy his whims. He began a tradition and left Samarkand one of the holiest cities of Islam.

Fifty years ago the Russians descended from the north, and settled in the gardens, groves and orchards to the south.

Great Maracanda, founded before the dawn of history, is a pile of dirt. "Not so old" Samarkand, the city of Timur, is mud huts, falling arches and chipped masonry. New Samarkand flies the red flag of Communism and ignores her sisters' forgotten splendor.

And now the old man showed his hand. He said he would take us to the Hazret Shah-Zindeh, a group of tombs and holy places built around the last resting place of Shah-Zindeh, a companion of the Conqueror. We passed over the mound of Maracanda, littered with mud bricks, broken bits of tile, carved and glazed pottery, and enameled stones. At one place where the bank had caved away, bones protruded from the hard-packed clay. The old man rushed up and grabbed one. It was quite solid.

Pointing to his arm and then to the bone, he laughed, but waved us violently away when we tried to feel it. Human bones! Perhaps as old as the city! But this stirred the skepticism of the Occident and Pete crashed through with "I'll bet the bum planted them for this very purpose yesterday."

"Hazret Zindeh," the mullah told us. Above us was a cluster of little domes, showing brown where the blue had chipped away. Forty (count 'em) marble steps, worn and battered, led up to a brilliant arch. Through the golden traceries of the arch was a long corridor, leading between the domes. There were the tombs of the wives, sisters, and generals of Tamerlane, each dazzlingly decorated in lovely yellow and turquoise arabesques, delicately and exquisitely designed by the cunning of artists from all over the known world.

There was such a profusion of perfections that it was impossible to give full appreciation to each. But one of them stands out in our memory with vividness, perhaps because of its name, perhaps because it was so far surpassing the others in beauty. "Sarai-Khanoum," the mullah said. "Wife of Tamerlane." Nestling like some jewel halfway down the passageway, it was reached by four marble steps which led to a square doorway traced in blue and brilliant gold. Two large snowy blocks of marble flanked the dark entrance, lending an air of purity to the colorful arabesques above it. We went inside, in spite of the protestations of the mullah that we were defiling the sacred.

It was too superb for description. The gloom intensified the flashes of brightness about the walls and on the domed roof. The most carefully lovely design spread its blue-gold dazzle over the whole, leading in a maze of delicate traceries always to the point of the dome. Directly under this point lay a simple, white stone casket, with a few blue scrawls of Arabic on its top. The simple and the ornate were combined to give an effect impossible to imagine.

And now "Shah-Zindeh," the mullah said. "Shah-Zindeh sleep. When Mohammedanism no strong, Shah-Zindeh wake up, fight."

At the end of the passage was the holiest tomb in Samarkand, the goal of thousands of pilgrim for hundreds of years. No longer do the faithful throng to this shrine, for with the passing of the glory of Samarkand went the passing of the popularity of old Zindeh. "It's about time," Pete observed, "that he did come to life. The lack of population around here is startling." Only a few mullahs sat at the entrance of the squat, corrugated dome, drinking tea and begging for alms.

Our mullah started praying as we took off our shoes. He was probably praying for the soul which would be condemned for allowing two infidels in the holy of holies. We did not join him, however, but entered the Place without making our peace with our Maker. There were a few very low doorways, all highly decorated, leading into small, dim, cavernous rooms, heavily carpeted with deep, faded rugs. The tomb itself was at the end, where a candle burned before a torn tapestry hanging over a plain black stone. The floor was worn into three smooth little cups made by the knees and the foreheads of countless prostrating faithful. Carved wooden doors a thousand years old shut the shrine away from all disturbance, and the air was still with an unearthly smell of quiet and of age.

"Look," the old man whispered. He took us into a little side room, half of it boarded off with heavy slats. We peered through them. An old yellowed book rested there in the gloom, its pages covered with illuminated script of Arabic. About the wall were piled rotting banners, rusty spears, swords embossed in gold, queer pieces of armor, and a heap of human bones spread in disorder. "Old, very old." The mullah whispered. "Timur the Great. Genghis Khan. There always. That book, Mohammed. Koran, sacred." A strange flush of excitement mastered us. The weapons of the Earth-Shaker! The Book of Mohammed! The standards of war! The bones of Saints! We descended the steps from the fairy palaces as if in some lasting dream, even distributing largess to the waiting mullahs without a thought.

It was not until we found ourselves squatting on the soft cool rugs of the old man's own mud hut that we came to with a start. He began to untie handkerchiefs and colored cloths, displaying to our startled gaze carved gourds, precious stones, amulets, uncut jewels, and old knives. He had some fifteen silver coins on which we recognized ancient Greek. "Alexander. I find on Maracanda."

"Pete," burst in Harry, "don't they look just like the pictures of Greek coins in the ancient history books!"

"I'm from Missouri," Pete said. "But how much is that cornelian amulet? Thirty rubles? No, no. Too much."

"Twenty-eight," spat the mullah, after fifteen minutes of explaining to us that he had picked it up on Maracanda, and that a horse of Timur's had made that crack by stepping on it.

"Twenty-eight? Take off the twenty," said Pete coolly, lighting his pipe.

We had all the time in the world. After much deliberation we decided to allow our meager bank-roll to suffer for just this once, even if we had to go without beer for a week. The mullah joined in to see how much he could make it suffer. But we were canny. We forsook all ideas of sportsmanship and stuck to our prices. We weren't going to be taken in by a lot of old amulets and talismans from the time of Noah. The argument went on and on, and the arithmetic grew more and more complex. When only one thing is to be sold, the business is easy, but when four or five are thrown in for a price, it's enough to tax anyone without an adding machine.

At last we played our trump. We got up calmly and left. The mullah met us around the corner and dragged us back, without a word. The stuff was ours. To complete the bargain he showed us about two hundred calling cards and letters, of every known nationality, most of them yellow and old, and all testifying to his integrity. There was only one American among the lot, and one English lady. We left our cards with him, writing on the fronts "of the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition" and on the backs a recommendation which would be intelligible only to our own countrymen: "This old boy seems to be O. K." (About five months later Harry entered the private office of an Oriental expert in the New York

Metropolitan Museum. "I'd like you to tell me what these things are," he said politely. And then with the nonchalant air of the person who has been places and done things he added casually, "I happened to pick them up in Samarkand." "Yes?" said the expert without a trace of interest. He looked at them. "This coin and this carved amulet are modern imitations and not even clever ones. This talisman or ring-seal is real. How old? Oh, perhaps a hundred years.")

"That gent had his nerve with him when he asked for baksheesh, after what we'd done for him," Harry observed. "What are we going to do now?"

In Samarkand with nothing to do! What was there to do? There we stood, wondering. "Let's eat." In answer to our wish a tall Uzbek passed with a large tray on his head, which rested there without visible means of support or balance. On the tray were a hundred or so small round cakes of bread, covered with flies. "I wonder who eats that stuff," Pete sneered. "I know I won't."

"You never can tell. You may have to some day." Harry was right. There was to come a time in the not very distant future when the young heroes were cheering at the sight of fly-specked sun-baked cakes, praising them as "real food at last." Heedlessly we wandered on, to stop the first civilized human for directions as to how to eat.

He was a nice man, but he was so startled that it soon became impossible to keep our little talk private. A crowd collected. "American Expedition to Turkestan!"

"Amerikanski, huh? How about Sacco and Vanzetti?"

We tried to flee the mob. "Never heard of them. Who are they?" Torrents of Russian. "Listen, comrades," we said together. "We are two poor American comrades going to Kashgar, and we've nothing to do with Sacco and his nasty friend. All we want is a little food. We're hungry. Food, see?" We put our fingers in our mouths and rubbed our stomachs.

"Hurry up, Pete. Find the word for empty." More darned Russian. We began to run.

Among the crowd was an embryo Marathon runner, and it was he who finally caught us. He smiled. "I will take you out to lunch at my club," he offered politely, or he might have said that it was a warm day. By the time we had finished our cabbage soup we discovered that his name was Stanislaus Bortkevitch Vladimirski; it took us until the salad was well inside to find out that he was a young Communist student from the Ukraine. The club, which was out of doors, belonged to the People—the "Workers Club."

He was short and smooth and rather rakish in his large turned-down hat and workman's shirt open at the neck. And he kept showing us a wide and beautiful smile. "Pete, I'm afraid of this guy. His smile is not very genuine. It's too good to be true. I don't trust him."

"Bunk!" said Pete. "He is just young, that's all. He won't bother us."

But he did bother us. He took us up to his own room, introduced us to a pale, ascetic-faced native who he said was his room-mate, and sat us down. Then he began to talk.

"(Blankety blank-blank) Communism (blankety blank) all right (blank and so forth)."

We agreed perfectly.

"America (blankety blank—lots of Russian) Communism (talk, more talk) already," he went on, warming to his subject.

"You bet," we told him. "You are perfectly right in what you say."

"Sacco-Vanzetti (a long string of syllables most of which were consonants, blank) a bad thing (blank, question mark)."

"Surely." He found us interested listeners.

"Morgan, Henry Ford, Rockefeller (more Russian) lots of money (spit, sizzle) workmen no money (hooey hooey) Communism all content (exclamation point)."

"Yes?" we admitted dubiously. We began to catch on.

"Well, then, you (sizzle crash boom) America tell (sis, boom, ah, Tiger) work hard (ray ray ray) Communism (Harvard, nine rahs) revolution ten years?"

We held a conference on that one. "You know something, Pete, old man. I think he's trying to convert us!" Great gods, not that. Convert us? Us, the sons of capitalism!

"Let him have his fun," said Pete, finally. "It may give him a free ticket to the Communist heaven."

"All right," we told him. "We'll do it. Shake hands on that." We thought that then we might be able to leave him.

He smiled widely and warmly. "Brekety-ex coax oo-up para-balou Yale fine," he said triumphantly. "Now let's go out and see the city."

In the yard on our way out we found a group of old men, women, and children sitting on the ground before a blackboard listening to a young Uzbek teaching applied arithmetic and demonstrating a tractor. "School," said Stan, grinning. After much more talk he mentioned one word we recognized. "Bazaars." He grinned again. Three hours later we were gasping for breath and wondering how the hell we could leave. The fellow was tiresome. One can become accustomed to the sound of an elevated railroad, but not to an impassioned young Communist who has just made two excellent foreign converts. An "L" doesn't require an answer, not even a moan.

The sun was setting slowly over the golden turrets. "Good-by, comrade." Harry interrupted a long speech on the progress of civilization. "We've got to catch a train."

"No, no," broke in Pete as he was preparing for a fresh outburst. "Don't you bother to see us off. We know our way around by now."

But Stan was adamant, train or no train. "Ice-cream. Uzbek ice-cream."

We were willing to be held by the call of the belly if not of the mind. "Well, just this once. But we have to rush." We sat down at a shady little table overlooking the main bazaars.

A big mound of brown tarpaulin was on the table before us. "Make it three," said Stan with the extreme nonchalance of those who treat. The mound was uncovered. Under it was a cake of snow! "From the mountains there. Look." We saw the white peaks shining over the domes and palaces far in the distance under the slanting sun. We looked back at the snow on the table. A dirty old man patted and kneaded it deftly with brown syrup on a flat tin plate. It reminded us of our childhood spent chasing ice-wagons for ice-shavings. After eight of them we felt more lenient toward the world and Stan. It was quite silent now while he ate.

Stan finally left, no doubt to report the credit he had made to the local Vote-Getters and Proselytizing Union of the Party. Again we had nothing to do in Samarkand. We had seen the ruins and were getting fed up with them, we had tapped our bank-roll, we had eaten, and there was no beer. Harry suggested the last resort. "We might as well take a bus ride. We can go back to Hollywood and see some more yes-men."

Bands were playing and crowds strolling about a cool, broad park as we shouted "yes" and dismounted in the New Samarkand. Children, clean and bright, trotted around, singing, or feeding crumbs to the goldfish in the fountain. Lovers whispered, arm in arm, or sat on benches in the fragrance of the evening; ordinary mortals enjoyed a restful chat under the spreading trees after a hot day's work. "Do you know, Pete, if it wasn't for all those clean white shirts we might be in the municipal park of Peoria?"

"Yes, and our dirty ones. Wouldn't we look fine all gotten up like this at home?"

"That music's nice. But say, isn't that stand over there selling beer?" We sprang to attention as one man, and fell over ourselves to reach the blessed fluid. It was beer, real beer, made right here in Samarkand. The best beer in Turkestan is brewed in the city of Timur.

And here we were in Samarkand, the Rome of Asia, built by Timur, filled by him with the riches of the world, and we were listening to a brass band and drinking beer!

We had forsaken a place teeming with the great deeds of history, overflowing with some of the world's noblest architecture, pregnant with romance, for a glass of beer. Perhaps it was not all our fault. But we knew we should regret it some day. "Babbitt," muttered Harry. We watched the bus draw near, the bus that was to take us away from all these missed opportunities. The beer turned sour in our mouths. We pushed our glasses away, disgustedly.

"Yes!" shouted Pete, as the automobile slowed down. And "yes" this time meant: "Please stop, I want to get on!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

AFTER THAT, OSH

> "Batoom Tifleesi, Bakoo;
> Karasnovodski;
> Mairrf, Bukhara-a, Samar-rkand;
> Kokand, Andizhan, p'tom Osh;
> I-i-i-i——."
>
> *Marching song of the Fighting Tartars*

GENGHIS KHAN used to travel a hundred miles a day on horseback. Tamerlane's ability to move fast, to think quickly, and to raise gigantic buildings almost overnight was the wonder of his age. One would imagine that modern science could take this heritage, and mold it into an organization of inconceivable speed.

Two hours we waited before the ticket window in the Samarkand station and nothing happened. The mob swirled and fought, sweating and groaning. The wicket had opened, closed; our train had come and gone on to the east, but the crowd seemed just as thick. We tried to talk, to say something to some one, but we were only stared down. Beer, excellent Samarkand beer, failed us when we could drink no more.

Most of the members of the fighting unit held little slips of paper stamped with the good old "pick and shovel." A burly soldier came down the line inspecting them. He reached us, and he looked in a bad mood, for he had been powerless to control the milling in the line. "Dawai!" he grunted. "Documenti."

Pete was most polite. "There isn't any (there aren't any, there ain't none)," said Pete severely in his best Russian.

The soldier unshipped his bayonet. "Why?"

"Just because we haven't any," Pete told him, oh, so sweetly.

This was too much for the intelligence of Lenin's minion. He called for his friends, and they came, whooping at the diversion. "No documenti? Then get the hell out."

We were ready with a smart come-back. "Amerikanski, we are. We go to Andijan. Us big expedition, heap big."

They fell back under this onslaught. "Passport," one of them asked in a subdued tone.

We conferred a moment. "I'm damned if I'm going to show them mine," was Harry's idea. "We have a transit visa and you know it says no stop-overs. We may get reamed for being in Samarkand without permission."

But Pete had a brilliant thought. "You know those Student Identity Cards we got. They look like passports, with our pictures in them. I'm going to try it." He pulled out the little blue book which certified that we were college students, and showed it. The effect was immediate.

One soldier wrote out an order for the ticket agent to give us fast service. Another called his friends, and they made an attack upon the crowd before us. They had to threaten with bayonets, but it wasn't long before we marched down a lane under heavy guard and planted ourselves at the very head of the line. The murmur swelled to a shout but it was soon quieted when the news got around. The next train, which came in at one-thirty A.M., took us on as the first of the chosen few. In that country one doesn't need a government requisition for a worker's vacation tour to get service. All one wants is to be an American, or perhaps just a foreigner.

We had more trouble getting through the gate. "Too much baggage," ordered the guard, even though we were carrying all of it ourselves. "You can't go on this train." We held up the whole line as we argued.

Some little man rushed up to the official. "French travelers. Let them through the gate." Smiles and handshakes sent us off.

"Next time," Pete panted, "we'll tell them we're Senegambians and try for a free ride. It pays not to be a Russian or an Uzbek."

"Yes," said Harry, heaving a duffel bag on the train. "But imagine a thing like that happening to a Russian in Cheyenne. I bet the Cheka in Moscow told them to be nice to us."

A Russian or even an Uzbek in Cheyenne would have received American accommodations. The rule worked out the other way also. There were two shelves, eighteen inches by five and a half feet, which belonged to us. Oh, yes, we also had the floor directly below as a spittoon. Sleep? Pete had a worse time than Harry, for he had six inches and seventy pounds more of him to put somewhere. If we bent or curled, our little Maries stuck out of the open window beside us; if we straightened, we bumped our heads on our knees. Hard class? "Sure," groaned Harry, hitting the roof with something soft. "Hard to sleep."

The next morning we saw an ironic sign on the outside of the car, "56 sitting, 40 sleeping." There were seventy people inside! Greasy Uzbeks, babies, more babies howling and drooling, the smell of unwashed bodies and strong cigarettes, the shuffle of grimy cards, and over all the bump, bump, bump, of the two-wheels as they hit the wide rail joints together. It wasn't hard to spend the day playing brakeman on the steps.

The train was ambling or rather moseying along very informally, pulling into a siding every few minutes to miss a fast freight or to let the engineer have a drink. "To-morrow, last stop before Kashgar, Pete." Harry tore with his teeth at the leg of a large roast chicken and bit off a piece of pickle. "We'll be through with this soon. And then, the wilds."

"Yes," Pete answered. "Bokhara we can check off, Samarkand, check also, Merv—well, we can say we've seen that. There isn't much from here on, is there? I mean, Andijan's not much."

Harry disappeared within to look at the time-table pasted on the wall of the car. He came back in a moment. "You forgot Kokand. And there's a nice place we go through called—wait a minute, I'll get it straight—Oorsatteveskaya. Yes, that's it. We might stop there."

A man came up and sat down beside us. He was the one clean man in the car. We opened up the conversation. "Is Oorsatteveskaya very interesting?"

He jumped. "Shto takoi? Oor-kak?"

Harry had memorized it and wrote it down "O-o-oh! You mean Oosaski!" He slapped his thigh and laughed. But it says that, and if it says that, why don't they call it that? He gave us a pitying glance for our ignorance, and sulked in the corner.

He warmed up later on, and broke into very bad French. He told us he was a young lawyer from Andijan, and that Andijan was a rotten town. "Bad water, bad kvas, bad grapes, bad women. Once the summer home of the Khans of Kokand, but now, there are no khans. The Emirs of Fergana used to go to Kokand for their summers.

Pete broke in, "If the Khans of Kokand went to Andijan, and the Emirs of Fergana went to Kokand, O.K. Where did the Emperors of Oosaski go?"

He gave us a dirty look and said almost petulantly: "I don't see why you come here from America to ask questions. Why don't you go to Moscow, to Leningrad? There you may see factories, and big shops, and theaters, and beautiful gardens, and operas. Here there is nothing of interest to you."

Nothing of interest? in Bokhara and Samarkand? in the Tien Shans? among the Kirghiz and the nomads and the wild hill tribes? Nothing of interest in Kashgar? We looked at him pityingly and said, distinctly, as a bored capitalist should, "We're tired of theaters, we're tired of factories, we're tired of operas." He left without a word.

"I think we ought to have asked him about the transportation from Andijan on, Pete. After all we don't know anything about it." Harry had a cursed streak of practicality.

"Oh, hell!" Pete yawned. "Something will turn up. It always has."

Kokand! We followed the example of the emirs of some place for forty minutes, and ate some borshch in the station restaurant. "Ate" is the word, for in Russia you can't drink soup. While we were there, a fellow passenger sat beside us with five richly dressed Uzbeks. They took no notice of us until we called the waiter and talked with him a bit, to find out how big the town was, and if we could have some more soup. That is, we said "Borshch."

They must have noticed that we forgot to clear our throats on the *r* in borshch. "German?" asked the passenger.

"No, American."

Came the usual chorus "Oh, ah! Americans?" They stared at us. Now they could all die happy. Rising solemnly, they placed the right hand over the heart, and bowed deeply in a stately manner.

"What do they put their hands there for?" whispered Harry.

"Sh! That's just from habit. They want to feel if they still have their pocketbooks." We took the hint. We arose and copied the bow.

The waiter was called and there was a hurried consultation. Then tall foaming glasses of brown were brought, and we were toasted. "I don't want to drink this Uzbek cocktail, Pete. It looks deadly."

The white man spoke to us gently in German. "In this country when you're offered a drink you must not refuse." That was the substance of his talk, anyhow.

We stood with a flourish, noticing that they had drained their glasses, and resolving to act like Romans. We bowed again, in unison. "Here's mud in your eye!" proclaimed Pete.

Harry had his turn. "May all your children look like me."

We drained the tall glasses at one gulp. Beer! Yet fishy beer! The sort of drink which sneaks up from behind and bites you when you aren't looking.

The white man answered our questioning glance. "Beer and vodka," he told us, turning a little yellow and beginning to resemble his native friends. The glasses were filled again.

"Pete," said one of the Uzbeks, pushing a glass down the table toward the honorable Mr. Peters.

"How do you suppose he knows my name? Did they send him from Moscow, or has our fame just naturally gotten around?"

Somebody yellow proposed a toast to America; the glasses were emptied, refilled, and emptied again over another toast. Pete turned worriedly to the white man, who was now quite yellow.

"What does Pete mean?"

"Pete? Trink, trink!"

"So Pete means drink, does it? Well, I guess I'll just hafta live up to m' name."

When the cold gray dawn of the morning after fell upon the two Lights of Asia the train had stopped, and left the Andijan car on a siding far out in the yards.

"Well," Pete panted, when we had carried the baggage back to the station, "the next thing is to get to Osh."

"P'tom Osh," Harry grunted. He had a terrible hangover. "Personally, I'd like to get this taste out of my mouth. Let's have a bowl of tea before we decide what to do."

We sat in the shade on a raised platform, and watched natives squatting and sucking about us. An Uzbek, as usual incredibly filthy, brought some tough cakes of bread and a china pot. Pete started to pour, and it came out thick and brown.

"Look at this tea. You can't even see the bottom of the bowl!" We let it settle, and drank the top, leaving an inch of sediment. It was neither sand nor gravel, but mud, plain, honest pie-mud.

"Let's leave. Why the Khans of Kokand ever came here is beyond me. We'd better get out."

"But how? They seem to have tied up all the camels."

"Isn't that a flivver station wagon over there? By Gosh, it is!" We ran over and found a burly Russian asleep before the wheel. We shook him.

"Does this go to Osh?"

He rubbed his eyes, yawned. "Osh-sh? Da-da-da! Skora, skora!" And he fell back, snoring.

"Hurry up, Pete, look up skora. That'll tell us when it goes."

Pete ran his finger down the page of the Good Book. "Skora—presently, soon, quickly, right away, now. We'd better get our stuff on fast. He might wake up and go." We brought our baggage out of the station, where a large crowd had collected.

Pete's watch was in his trouser pocket. His hands were busy. The watch was gone. A little brown man scuttled away.

Pete threw down his load and seized the culprit. He was sure that it was the man. He frisked him, none too gently, and found only an old piece of string. He noticed another brown man standing nearby. Pete let go of the first and searched the second, but found nothing. He seized another and ran his hands over the dirty clothes. Soon he had the whole bunch cowed, but still no watch. Pete's two hundred pounds and red hair do not help to make him particularly gentle with strangers.

Diligence with locked stables did no good. Pete came out, cursing. "Some son of a so-and-so stole my watch. I searched every one of them."

"Hey, I saw a little yellow bird running out of here a few minutes ago. It must have been he."

"Damn these guys! You can't catch them. They all belong to the same club. Oh, well, let it go. It was only an Ingersoll."

"Come on then. We don't want to miss the bus." Miss it? We piled in. Miss it? At the stroke of noon, four hours later, we remembered that we could eat melons, and this helped to pass the time until three, when a small hooting boy appeared, woke up the driver, and filled the rusty radiator.

The small boy also had to crank the ancient engine, which coughed and sputtered for a while in vain protest. At last we left the muddy water of Andijan behind, and entered the dusty desert.

It took us almost four hours to go the thirty miles to Osh. The road wound up gently sloping hills, over the sun-baked desert, where nothing was to be seen as far as the eye could reach, where blank, bleak expanses of hard clay stretched into the hazy horizon. The dilapidated motor insisted upon boiling over at the slightest rise in ground· and this naturally called for a halt, while it cooled off and while the boy filled it with water. At each stop for this purpose we were startled by a gentle zzzzzzz! coming from the front seat. The driver was asleep again!

It was not only the frequent boilings of the engine which provoked a stop. Several oases beckoned with their cool greenness to the dusty passengers and to the tired flivver. The driver always obeyed their urgent call, and rested for a while to enjoy a bowl of tea, a melon, and a smoke. "Say, we want to get to Osh some time," said Pete indignantly, as the lure of a pile of melons caught the driver's fancy. The boy only grinned and pointed to the shaky engine. He was partly right. The old machine bore its twelve years with no especial virility.

The only time Mr. Ford's Lizzie was put to her utmost was when we met one of the numerous caravans which wended their plodding way towards Andijan. We came upon one as we were running along a flat ridge lined with low trees and bushes. The boy saw the cloud of dust ahead. "Give it to her," he yelled, or words to that effect. The driver opened the throttle wide. Engine roaring, spitting flames of fire, a whooping boy hanging out of its side, the yellow dragon charged upon the little donkey which led the long line of camels. The bearded peak-hatted man on the donkey jerked his tiny beast aside in alarm. The lead camel, tied to the donkey, followed. Each succeeding camel was tied to the saddle of the one in front of him. "Whoops!" hooted the devil on the dragon, as that monster rushed past the donkey and tore at the flank of the line of camels. The heavy beasts, loaded with huge bales of wool, lurched their bulky selves out of the way, and then began to plunge, to rear, to fall in a scrambling heap, or to tangle themselves among the roadside trees. Forty camels make a long line, and a wild monster can cause some little confusion. "Whoops!" shrieked the boy as we downed the last one and turned to see in the cloud of dust swearing drivers shaking their fists, chasing horses across the fields, and being tossed here and there by maddened animals.

Every camel, every horse which had not been autobroken, every donkey on that long road was accounted for by the monster of science, laid low and left sadder but somewhat wiser by this modern Moloch, the rusty little Ford. Their simple, old-fashioned lives were ruptured by this pioneer of the Machine Age. Not since their ancestors had looked upon the white Italian face of Marco Polo had they been so frightened; the great explorer, first of his race to penetrate their land, had given no warning of this ogre filled with his descendants.

To the natives of Osh's suburbs the advent of the flivver was also a moment of importance, causing curiosity rather than dread. For dear old back-breaking Model T was out of her environment. She had been designed only to bear home-coming bond-salesmen from the five-fifteen commuters' local to the little green-shuttered cottage by the seashore. The inhabitants of the district were as surprised to see us as Bond-seller Jones, tired from Wall Street, would have been if he had driven from the depot into these surroundings. He would have stared at natives in four-cornered white and black peaked hats even harder than the natives would have stared at his new Brooks business suit; his eyes would have opened wide when he saw faded-cloaked women plodding dumpily along, or peering through the dingy lattice veils which reached to their waists. As he became used to it, he would have criticized the insecure beauty of the unveiled young girls who fondled babies in doorways. He would have laughed as the dirty native children girded up their bright garments and raced the station-wagon until the wrath of Allah descended on their tousled heads in the form of a parent or two. But when he saw the many rearing horses, and the lines of placid camels, and the droves of sheep, and the natives on black, shaggy yaks, he would have turned to his wife and said, "I knew I ought not to have taken that last drink from the boys on the train. Get me home, and get me home quick."

For the benefit of the native audience we dashed at a mad pace along the narrow streets of the old section of Osh, and swung around a corner on two wheels, pulling to a halt in the new city. The street stretched wide and far between grass-grown sidewalks, and like the great arch of some tremendous cathedral, tall, pearl-colored poplars mingled overhead in a dense green roof of branches. Straight and long these high tree-trunks glimmered brightly in the gathering dusk, enclosing the converging tube of the street, which ended, far in the distance, with an arched spot of light. Little whitewashed houses showed dimly through the row of trunks, houses of one story set back from twin muddy brooks running behind and under the trees.

"How many?" asked the driver, speaking for the first time and holding a pad of tickets for us to see.

"Two, please," we told him, entering into the spirit of the fun. He must have been able to count at least up to two. We paid for them, turning away. "Tickets, if you please," he called after us.

" 'Red' tape," Pete grunted. "Well, we're here. Last stop, Osh!"

"And then—," asked Harry, shouldering his pack.

"Kashgar!"

CHAPTER NINE

CHEEK BY JOWL WITH LENIN

WHEN a modern traveler enters a city he takes a taxi from the railroad station to a hotel, and settles himself. If he does not know the name of a good hotel, he asks the taxi driver, or one of his fellow passengers, or a policeman. When his residence is established he can then spend his evening according to his tastes.

The process at Osh was slightly different. There were no hotels, no fellow passengers, and apparently no policemen. Acting on the assumption that our first concern was to find a place to lay our heads, we went into executive session.

Harry wanted to ask the first person we saw for a hotel, knowing that there were none. But Pete was opposed to such blunt methods. "No, that might look as if we were fishing for an invite, as we would be. Let's be more tactful. I've always found that something is bound to happen. If we go down there to that corner we can wait in the middle of the street for it. There'll be more people. If I'm not mistaken, it's the Osh official Broadway and Forty-second Street."

We loaded on the packs and walked slowly beneath the tree-topped arch in the middle of the road. At the corner we stopped. The place was deserted. We stood there, waiting for the inevitable to happen, and having supreme faith in our fabulous luck.

Just as a crowd collects in a deserted spot when a fire or a big accident takes place, or as hornets swarm when the syrup is spilled, people began to wander past, to stop, to approach us as we remained in the center of the corner emulating traffic policemen. It was not long before quite a mob had assembled. Somehow they shunned us while staring, forming a wide ring about us, but keeping their distance lest the strangers should try to bite. We heard whisperings passing around. We felt as overgrown Alice did when the animals attacked her house. It sounded as if the multitude was electing a "Bill" to put down the chimney. There was much silent argument, but we remained there, unmoved. At last a "Bill" came forward, timorously.

"Who are you?" he asked in a scared whisper, ready to run.

We rattled it off. Not for nothing did we have a conversation book. "We are American students. We are an expedition sent by the American government to explore Chinese Turkestan. We are here in Osh to get horses. Where can we sleep?"

"Bill" went back to his friends with the cheering news that we were not dangerous. It must have been Pete's red hair which had scared them. A whisper ran around the circle, grew in volume to a loud chatter, in which we caught the words "America" and "expedition." The circle closed in, laughing and holding out their hands to be shaken by the distinguished visitors.

"Where can we sleep?" we asked again, when we had made them all feel at home. A grimy fellow pointed to an open tea-platform loaded with natives staring curiously over their tea-bowls. "Chaikhana, there. Tea-house."

"Gee, Pete, we can't sleep there. We'll get robbed. Remember the watch this morning and never trust an Uzbek."

"I do not understand you," chorused the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition. "Where can we sleep? Where may we sleep?" But the members of the congregation were busy telling the hot dope to those who had arrived late, and who had missed part of the fun. We repeated the question, with variations.

"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" A small, thin voice seemed to come from the direction of the ground. Pete looked down about three feet, Harry about two. Close-clipped yellow hair and a hard, strong little face was turned up at us.

"Sure, Mike! We sprech Deutsch very well."

"Kommen Sie mit," ordered the boy, with an authoritative toss of his head.

"Pete, it's come. Golden opportunity. But what are we going to do when he finds out that all the German we know is the word for eggs?"

We followed him down a hill past the tea-houses, fearing for a moment he was going to turn in there. But he went on, past whitewashed hovels, past mud-brick huts, to a dwelling slightly more pretentious. We entered after him, through a dark outer room where a pot was stewing on a tiny Primus stove, into a small inner room containing three beds, a few chairs, and a table. We threw our stuff on the floor.

"Mein Vater und meine Mutter," said the boy. A woman straightened up from leaning over the bed, a blue-shirted man arose from the table.

We knew that the first impression always is of most importance. With a supreme linguistic effort we pulled our coup, rushing forward. "Good Morgan! Good Morgan!" *"And* Henry Ford, *and* Rockefeller," Harry was heard to murmur, as if in prayer.

The man smiled and shook hands. The toil-worn face of the woman creased in wrinkles and she shook hands. A blowzy daughter appeared; a baby, two younger boys, and a little girl crossed in rapid succession. We sat down and made ourselves completely and permanently at home. The conversation began to languish.

"Have you had your dinner?" the man asked, squinting one eye and making noises.

"No," said the Expedition.

"What do you want to eat?" the signs and sounds went on.

"Eggs," was the unanimous reply in fluent German. By the process of elimination it had to be eggs. Our fluent German went no further.

We seemed to be in the bosom of the family. He went out and came back, not only with eggs, a dozen of them, but cutlets and bread. He ordered his wife to get busy, and we sat down to a hearty meal.

We tried to be polite, but it was very hard. "How are we going to apologize to him for being here, Harry? We can't do it in German and we can't do it in Russian." However, we attempted to open the conversation. We gave him our cards, for calling cards always impress in the East, even when unreadable.

"My name is Nicholas Nagel," he told us. We dragged out the dictionary. We sought his occupation. He had an awful time finding the word. At last he pointed to it. "Butterflies. Moths. Silkworms." To strengthen the argument he brought out his collection. He was a bug-hunter! He spent his time in search of methods to exterminate cotton and silkworm parasites!

He gave us a lecture on the insect life of Turkestan. He had boxes and boxes of mounted specimens of moths and butterflies, some of extreme rareness and beauty, some highly destructive. He had many jars of live caterpillars, cocoons, and insects. He was working then on the cotton weevil, which was ruining the crop.

"How much money do you make?"

He gave us a look of satisfaction. "A hundred rubles a month, the government pays me." A hundred rubles for an expert! Enough to support his wife, two daughters, grandchild, and three sons in a one-room, kitchenette apartment! "But I have no luxuries, except my coffee. I will not give up my coffee in this tea-drinking country."

"Yes," he answered in reply to our question, feverishly turning pages. "I am German. My wife is German. Our families came to the banks of the Volga at the time of the great Katerina, two hundred years ago, from Deutschland. Yes, I can speak Russian, but my Frau, she does not know how. Where would she learn?"

Nick was a proud man, proud of his nationality, proud of his ancient family, proud of his service during the war against his own people. But he would not talk about Communism. He was not a Communist himself, but he worked for the government, and he did not feel he could criticize his boss. In looks he was a typical German peasant, brown bowed mustaches which looked as if their use was straining beer, hard short physique, thinning greasy brown hair. His wife had that long, square face, lined and creased with a life of toil, so characteristic of the German lower classes. The daughter was pretty in a blowzy, brown-haired, full-busted way; too young to be a mother, and promising to resemble the old woman in far too short a time. Her servant-girl features lighted up delightfully, giving her a nuance of the vague beauty of motherhood when she fondled her child. "Zander, little Zander. See the two strangers from America. When you are big like them you can go to America too." But little Alexander only drooled at that idea.

Bedtime came, and the Expedition was given the honor due its illustrious presence. Blankets were spread on the floor, pillows provided at some one's thoughtful loss, and we partially disrobed and crawled in. The ladies disappeared into the hall-kitchen, as the men-folk settled themselves. Lights were turned out, and the ladies came in and went to bed. Nine souls slept in that little room that night, four of them on the floor. So that was why Russians are such a hardy race. Oh, but that floor was soft compared to "hard-class" railroads! The art of hospitality is not lost in Turkestan.

In the morning we were introduced to a new thrill by little Nick, our first friend. A rapid glacial stream rushes milkily through the fertile valley of Osh on its tumultuous way to the Oxus. We remembered our intensive training at the beaches of Batoum and Baku, and disrobed entirely for the first time since the salty Caspian. Disrobed? Scraped is the word.

"Brrrr! It's cold. Where do they make this water?"

Pete shivered, and took his toe out. "This comes from where we're going. Now see what we're up against."

We waded knee-deep in the torrent and washed. The current was strong, tremendously strong, threatening to spill us at any moment. Pete suddenly shouted. "Horse feathers. There goes the soap down to the Aral Sea."

"Ow, damn it. There I go too." Harry struggled ashore a hundred yards away. "Dawgone you, to lose that soap before I've washed my underwear."

It is remarkable what a change of "linen" does for one's self-confidence. Feeling fit to lick a couple of Tuaregs and any number of Comrades, we marched proudly back to Nick's for breakfast. During the meal we asked him about horses. "You must go to the office of the Sovtorgflot, on Main Street." The Sovtorgflot? What was that? Was it the Gay-Pay-Oo? The dictionary was printed during the Czar's régime, and contained none of the new condensed language.

We went, anyhow, prepared for the worst, with a few glib phrases on the tips of our tongues. There was the sign, "Sovtorgflot, Osh," over one of the whitewashed houses on the Avenue of Poplars. We walked through a gate and found ourselves at the servants' entrance.

The People were having breakfast under the shade of a gigantic tree. A large silver samovar sat on the table, bread was piled all about it. A quick, nervous man with incredibly close-clipped hair looked up, smiling shyly. "Sit down," he told us. "Have some tea. I have heard of you. My name is Georgii Vasilyevitch Yevdokimoff. My wife, two American students. And Alexander Vasilyevitch Vlasovsky, Leonid Katchanoff. Oh, yes, my two young sons."

We sat down, presenting our cards after the proper number of bows, and mentally taking note of the company. George's wife was a sweet young girl with a lovely smile and a marvelous profile. Her hair was tied in a knob low on her neck, setting off the high forehead and the sweeping lines of her face. Pete said later that she reminded him of "Greta Garbo without the Garbo." Al was thin-lipped, broad-shouldered, terse, with the rich deep voice which seems to be common to the Russian, husky enough to make it throb with feeling, smooth enough to lend an indescribable charm to its varied inflections. We could listen to that voice for long hours without understanding, captivated by its music and its rare quality.

The last member of the tea-party, if we omit the two skinny brats, we at once christened "Shorty," if christening is allowed in Russia. He was a tough, chunky little fellow, built like a brick factory, and with an overabundance of energy which we found hard to cope with. He was studying law, and when he found Pete was in the same business, he became our lifelong friend. We were made completely at our ease by everyone, and started in on the tea without more formality.

It grew to be a game, this tea-drinking. The natives tried to see how many cups the foreigners would drink. After the sixth cup they showed us something new. Cherry jam! Cherry jam in tea! It makes a delicious drink. Try it, O ye tea hounds, parlor snakes, and ladies of the salon. It puts hair on your chest. After the thirteenth cup we stated our purpose, lazily. We wanted horses and a guide to take us to Kashgar.

George jumped up. Fun was over, business had begun. He dragged us away from our tea, hired a feidung, and drove all over the city producing an Uzbek here, a Sart there, a Kurd or a Kirghiz from somewhere else. Tall, smooth yellows they were, wearing the long native cloak and Mongolian mustache. One of them, taller and smoother and more yellow than the others, seemed to please George, and we were ushered into the dirty, dingy mud doorway of his home.

It was dark and smelly in that little rug-strewn room, but we were not to remain there. Beyond was a beautiful garden, with trees, and shade, and cool thick rugs on which to recline. Brilliant birds flashed bright colors among the branches and filled the place with song. A little brook gurgled beneath the trees, mingling its whisper with the music of the birds and with the strange semitones which came softly and dreamily from a long instrument played by a reclining native in a many-colored cloak.

Another native lay on the rugs eating raw eggs and tea. He hitched himself over as we stretched out, while George fell to making noisy negotiations. He offered us a cup of the brown tea and an egg. What a wonderful life to lead, we thought as we drank. If we could only take an Eastern garden back home with us, we could enjoy the remainder of our days in the luxury of delightful idleness. A fascination, a haze of romance lingered over the place. Forgotten were George's business methods, forgotten were the Uzbeks, forgotten the fact that the Schroeder-Peters combination was an expedition and that Kashgar lay before us. Softly, gently, movingly, Harry groaned, or perhaps intoned in an orgy of triteness:

"Oh, peace to Máhmúd on his golden throne!

A Book of Verses underneath the bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing—"

Pete interrupted with a sudden return to earth, fleshly earth, "The modern Omar. Khayyam brought up to date. Listen!" But even *his* voice was a low moan under the spell of the garden.

"A Book of Conversations 'neath the Bough,
A Bowl of Tea, a juicy Egg and—

Oh, hell! Where's the Thou? That's all we need, just a couple of Thous."

"Oh, shut up. Haven't you got any romance? Let's go, George is finished."

"Well, we came to get horses and not to spout poetry, didn't we?"

George was getting a bit tired of the conversation book, and having to search feverishly for words in the dictionary. He took us back to the Sovtorgflot, and left us to the kind mercies of his charming wife. She it was who brought in another charming wife of somebody, and together they raked up a lady who spoke French. We supposed her, quite naturally, to be a derelict old capitalist fallen under the System, who had been deported to Osh, just as the other old lady had been deported to Bokhara. This theory was strengthened by a certain grace and dignity of bearing in her which we supposed was the birthright of only ci-devant aristocrats. We were wrong.

Mrs. Deported Capitalist knew very little about horses. But she gave us one significant warning. "You must first see the Gay-Pay-Oo and present your papers. That is important. And only then must you consider ways and means with the Sovtorgflot to travel to Kashgar. Across the street in that house is a German-Russian Expedition, which is leaving to-day for the Pamirs. Go there and perhaps some one will give you the information you want, and what you must do to have your papers authorized."

We'd forgotten all about the "Red" tape. We hoped that our mistake would cost us no penalty. We charged across the street. Was the failure to report one's presence a capital crime?

A fine-looking, well-built gentleman dressed to the minute in the approved explorer's costume came out of the house, hand resting on leather glasses case. We barged up to him. "Do you speak English?" He seemed slightly surprised. "Well, do you speak French?"

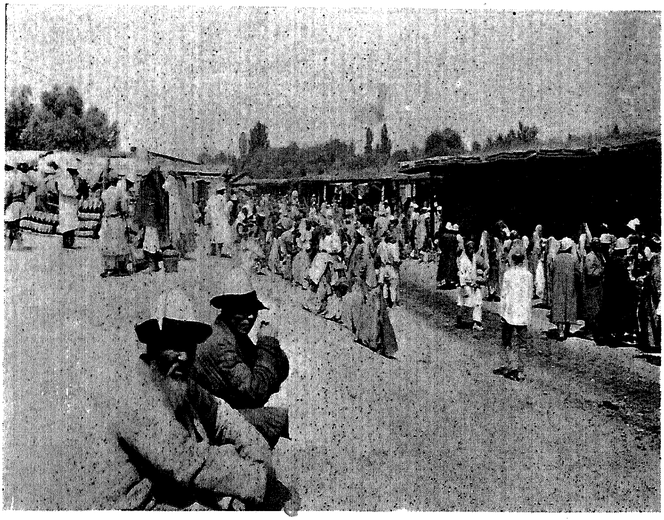
He nodded with dignity. "Yes, I speak a little."

We rushed in where angels have stepped aside. "Where's the police?"

The gentleman was kind. We told him who we were. "American students, going to Kashgar. We want to know whether our papers are O.K."

He was interested, although we gave him slight opportunity to talk. He took us around to the home of the com-

A Fast Freight Arrives from Kashgar



Market Day at Osh

"Comrade Frieda, my friend."

"I am the leader of this expedition."

missar of Osh, routed that dignitary out of bed, and introduced us. "Comrade Yerokhin, the commandant of the city." There was a girl also, young and attractive. "Comrade Frieda, my friend."

It was at once evident that both the girl and the commandant felt great respect for our gentleman friend. But then a member of an expedition sent by the government would be respected by inhabitants of Osh. The necessary business was accomplished with dispatch by the young officer, a handsome devil, brisk, efficient, with a friendly but well-controlled gold-toothed grin. He could not have been more than thirty, and looked exactly like an advertisement of the successful young man of business, one of those "Mary, I got the job—they made me president" young lads. And yet he, the boss of such a large corporation as Osh, deferred to our chance acquaintance. The girl spoke French much better than we, but she was strangely silent when Comrade Expedition was around.

Our Comrade took us back to his house and left us on the plea of pressing business. Later we were eating dinner quietly and beerily under the cool trees of a little open-air restaurant, when in walked the Comrade. With him were the girl, two bearded men who can only be described by the word "savants," and a short, nervous fellow. They solemnly sat down at our table. It looked as if the Cheka was coming to do its dastardly work. We grew excited, thirsting for the worst. Seriously, swiftly, business was begun. The girl translated.

"I am the leader of this expedition to the Pamirs," said the Comrade, and we were impressed. "We are on a mission of exploration, to collect information on the geology, biology, geography, and botany of the district. You must know that there are thousands of square kilometers of land in the Pamirs so far totally unexplored, valleys four and five thousand meters high, mountains up to eight and a half thousand. We are the first expedition to attempt to map and explore this territory." So he was the leader! No wonder he was respected. He went on. "But that is beside the point. Now you know who I am." Did we? We would have believed him if he had said he was Father Lenin! "I would like you to do me, the Soviet State, and science a very great favor." We held our breaths. This man asking *us* to do him a favor?

"There is a large number of different varieties of grain, of fruit, of nuts, in the Chinese Turkestan. It is of high scientific interest to know exactly the species growing in different places. No one has ever made a research into the crops of Turkestan. If you would, it would be of immense help to science if you could collect specimens of the different grains, fruit seeds, nuts, and leaves, and mark them with the place they were found, the date, and the local native name. Of course the State will reimburse you for your expenses, and provide horses and the necessary materials for your needs."

Great gods and little fishes! Who were we to be trusted with a mission so important? How did he know we were reliable, if we are? How could two dumb college boys be turned into botanists at the stroke of a pen? Would we take it! Pete controlled his emotions by a visible effort and attempted to appear calm. Harry, by a superhuman strength of will, refrained from whooping. Working for the government! What super-hyper-superlative luck!

"Here's a letter to the Soviet Consul-General in Kashgar. He will do everything in his power to help you. You may stay with him there, and you will find him pleasant and agreeable. If you need anything, do not hesitate to call upon him. And here's a requisition on Comrade Yerokhin to provide you with horses."

Excitement was repressed as completely as possible, and we began to consider. We were young capitalists, in spite of the shortness of our bank-roll. We were attempting to make our trip on the money we had brought, if just to prove it could be done. In all fairness we could not prostitute our consciences and accept charity from the State when we were not in sympathy with its unknown doctrines, even if that charity would make our beds and meals softer when we came to go home. We were out to accomplish on our own for the mere sake of accomplishment itself. Of course taking charity would make things a thousand times easier in the future, but when we got home— "Well, did you make it on the money?" "Not quite. We had to get the Russian government to help us." That would not do.

"We are sorry, but we cannot accept your proposal." His face fell. "We will supply our own horses."

He beamed again, kindly. "Take this requisition, anyway. The commandant can procure the best horses cheaply. Now I will give you my address. I would appreciate it if you would write to me when you get home. And one more thing. If the customs questions your identity, or if anyone offers to stop you in Russia, mention my name. All know who I am."

All know who he is! Does every Russian know the name of the leader of a Pamir expedition? Does every American know the name of the head of the Party to Discover the Fruits of the Fijis? He wrote in the back of our conversation book: "Nikolai Petrovitch Gorbunoff, Soviet Narodnik Kommissar, Upravlyeni Delami, Sovnarkoma, Kremlin, Moscow." Kremlin, Moscow? Isn't Kremlin the government building, the Capitol?

"Now I would like to take your photographs. I am sorry, but the expedition is leaving this afternoon, and I have not much time to spare." We posed, trembling with excitement, and the whole party filed out, leaving the girl, Frieda, to us. "Thank you very much for the beer." And he was gone.

"He is the most charming gentleman I have ever met," said Frieda wistfully. "He is on his vacation now, and expects to spend three months up there in the snows. I met him in Andijan while I was staying with my brother, who is commissar in that city."

"Who were the other gentlemen with him, those two with the beards and the short man?"

"They of the beards are the professor of biology and the president of the State University in Moscow. The short man is Krylenko, the Minister of Law of the central government."

"Gosh, they must be important men! We had no idea that we would have the honor to meet such people. But that lady we talked to this morning, the one who spoke French. Have you any idea who she was? We thought she must be some old capitalist sent down here."

"Do you mean the lady at the Sovtorgflot? Capitalist? That person is the wife of the Minister of Law, one of the greatest men in the State, and she is a very great Communist herself, a leader of the Party!"

Good Lord! And still they came. "Whew, we seem to be *it* to-day. There's just one thing more. What does all this hooey (or whatever the French for it is) that he wrote in our book mean? Is Gorbunoff much too? He isn't, is he? Say he isn't!"

"Gorbunoff?" Her dark eyes opened wide. "You mean to tell me you have never heard of Gorbunoff?"

"No, we have never heard of him!"

"Nikolai Petrovitch Gorbunoff is chairman of the Central Executive Presidium Council of the whole Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. He holds one of the most exalted positions in our State that it is possible for man to attain!"

The expedition and Frieda walked out to the street completely wilted. The Expedition? It was now an expedition in more than our own minds. The Schroeder-Peters-Soviet-Government Central Asiatic Expedition for the Advancement of Science, Incorporated and Duly Authorized. But that seemed to matter little. The important thing in our minds was that we were on official business for Gorbunoff! We were going to Kashgar for him!

CHAPTER TEN

COMMUNISM PREFERRED

FRIEDA was Young Communism personified in a single individual. As a human she was dark-skinned, sunburned, healthy, with thick black hair drawn in tight folds above black, deep eyes. Vivacious, athletic, graceful, she was dressed to give herself full freedom of movement, allowing of no restraint. Her smile was open, full-hearted, her voice filled with the delicious trills and quavers of the Continental woman's. To talk to her about ordinary matters was to find her charming, friendly, exceedingly courteous, a fascinating, flashing, captivating girl, simple in manner and speech.

It was only when Frieda was moved to speak of her Ideal that she was changed, transformed from a sweet young girl to a moving, irresistible force. The soft lines of her face tightened into ruthless, Slavic hardness, her silvery voice trembled with the passion of conviction. She became a fierce, vivid spirit, filled with the zeal of Idealism. Then it was that those black, bottomless eyes burned with the fervent fires of the Truth as she saw it, a Truth which was to her the supreme ideal of unselfish man, the one salvation for a world grown crass and cruel from materialism.

Whether she was right or wrong matters little; her transcendent faith in herself and what she stood for was so powerful, so much a part of her very being, that it was impossible to resist being fascinated by the thrill of her words. They rose like some star of idealism from the stark, hard-cut horizon of reality; they filled the soul with a higher excitement; they stung the mind, in spite of innate cynicism, with the loftiness of that Truth for which she was so fiercely fighting.

Harry started the whole thing by asking Frieda a question. We were walking her through the deserted streets under the silver poplars. What Harry said was simple in itself, but it started an argument which lasted far into the night. "Would you mind explaining to us what Communism is?"

The underlying idea seems to be that man will no longer choose to live as he has lived for fifty thousand years. He will resist the laws of nature by which he has prospered, he will renounce the selfishness which has placed him where he is. No longer will he bow to those spurs of ambition, the so-called instincts of self-maintenance, or the jealous guarding of his rights to live and to better his lot; self-propagation, or the irresistible urge to continue his species; self-gratification, or the pursuit of his pleasures and amusements. Man shall strive for fellow man; fellow man shall be man's first thought, before himself.

And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work
for fame;
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate
star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It, for the God of Things
as They Are!

"Go to your God," said Frieda. "Look into the teachings of your Christ. Forget all the dogma, the ritual, the pagan mythology which obscures your religion. Find the true meaning of your Christ's words and believe them. There you have the socialist Ideal.

"Christ was the first great socialist. After him have come many. We follow the teachings of Marx, we recognize the material facts of existence and we face them, but we have the ideal of socialism toward which we are continually moving.

"You believe that God made man in his image, and that He created all things. We believe that Man made god in *his* image, and that when we are dead we shall be down there below the ground. We believe therefore that we should spend our efforts on this earth for the progress of the world, that we should work with all our energies in making the world a better place for all men who come after us. Without that work our lives have failed."

"What is this ideal for the world which you are talking about?"

Frieda grew tense as she talked, stressing each point with gestures which lost no charm by their firmness. And as she spoke, it seemed to us that all the sorrow of the world was in her voice, all the sorrow and an immense optimism for the joy to take its place.

"Work, work with all your strength, and all that you need will be given you. Fill your place in the world with the best you have, give yourself in labor, and you shall receive what is necessary for your life."

"But, Frieda, some people need more than others.

Some people are brought up to need more, some have great ambition, some are satisfied with little while others are never satisfied. What will you do with them?"

"A man cannot wear more than one shirt at a time. He cannot sleep on more than one bed. He cannot live in more than one house. He cannot eat more than will fill him. Why should one man have three automobiles when his brother has to walk? Has he been set aside by Fate to enjoy more than his brother?"

"Yes, he has. His own intelligence has—"

"All men are created equal. Your Lincoln said that. Every man has equal rights to live, and to live equally with his brother."

"Now, Frieda, ma chérie, you know that's the greatest fallacy that has ever been uttered. All men are born equal in so far as each has the human form, but there are immense differences in physique, and in native intelligence. All men are not equal."

Frieda softened a little. "You are right. But everyone has a position in the world to fill, a position equal to his intelligence and his health. He must find that position and fill it. By doing so he entitles himself to a certain standard of existence.

"In the ideal socialistic State there will be no money. No one will need money, for there will be nothing to buy. One shall receive by work. One shall receive equally, not by importance of the work, but by the fact of his working. There will be no private property; all will belong to the State, for who is entitled by birth to have more than his comrades? Pleasures and relaxation will be provided for workers by the State; houses, food, and clothes will be supplied, education will be free and equal. The individual shall work for the good of the whole, and the whole shall benefit the individual."

Amazing! "That's all very ideal, and all that, but will it work? Will it work? As we say in our country, I come from Missouri!"

"Meesooree? Where is that? I thought you came from America."

"Oh, that just means that I want to be shown. I am cynical. I do not believe until I see the proof. There is a state in our land where the people are like that."

"Ah, I understand. You do not believe. In perhaps fifty, perhaps a hundred years you will see. It will be so."

"Give it a thousand, Frieda, ma chérie, give it a thousand. But you speak of the ideal. Now tell us of the practical. What is being done to-day toward that ideal?"

"Communism is the step—" she began, when Pete interrupted.

"There's Gorby's outfit getting ready to start." We had wandered by the Sovtorgflot, where a great crowd of soldiers, horses, and men were gathered.

"Ah, there is Comrade Nikolai." Frieda's voice held a sob. "I must say farewell to him." And she rushed off.

Fifty soldiers were holding rearing chargers while the last preparations were made. Nine men and one woman walked horses back and forth before the troop of pack animals. The usual Eastern mob stared and chattered. Pete was excited. "Here's for a picture."

He approached an officer and pointed to his camera. A vigorous negative was his answer. He stood around and waited. Comrade Gorbunoff walked to the head of his cavalcade, bidding a lasting good-by to Frieda. Pete rushed forward. "May I take your picture?"

"Certainly." He posed, shook hands with both of us, mounted his horse, and gave the word to start. Three months in the unexplored! Comrade Gorbunoff's Expedition passed on in a cloud of dust. Comrade Gorbunoff! In spite of ourselves that thrilled us. Comrade! We were equal to the great! He was not one of the greatest men in Russia. He was just our Comrade!

Frieda was heartbroken. "He is the finest man I know. He has been so kind to me. Il est si gentil, si sympathique. You must excuse me—I cannot talk now. I must go to my house for a while. But I will see you at dinner if you wish."

Poor Frieda. She must have been awfully fond of him. But then, who could help it?

"Now, Pete," said Harry later, at tea, wiping the juice of a melon from his chin. "Do you remember Keller's course in anthropology at college? Can you recall any of the stuff? We've got to muster a few well-chosen, red-hot arguments for Frieda this evening. We can't let her put it all over modern scientific fact like this. So far, it looks as if she's ahead. You just can't argue about theories."

"Well, I can't remember much. We'll do our best. How about some more tea?"

There they were with us at tea, the living examples of Frieda's idealism. George worked like a nigger for the Sovtorgflot, often far into the night. Shorty studied law with his interminable energy, seeking to rise high in his profession. Al had the attitude of a tired business man on his vacation. George's wife seemed completely happy with her simple lot, and she managed George with a hand firm beyond her years. The children seemed happy without complicated toys, but then children are always happy. And Gorby had taken a vacation from the exacting cares of government only to battle with the snows of the Pamirs for three months. Were they working for money? for honor? or only for the glory of labor?

"How much does Comrade Gorbunoff make in a month?" we asked Frieda, as we settled ourselves with her and a young lady-friend under the trees in the open-air restaurant.

"Ah," she told us. "He is Communist. He cannot have more than two hundred and twenty rubles a month."

"But I thought you were all Communists here?"

"Oh, no. We all want to be Communist but it is very difficult. One must work diligently for years in a period of probation, one must show one's sincerity for the cause, and then one is elected to the Party. Many do not believe in Communism, and leave things as they are."

"How many Communists have you?"

"Now there are about two million in the whole of Soyooz Sotzialistitcheskikh Sovietskikh Respooblik. But there are a great number on probation, and many Young Communists, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. They will all become members of the Party in time."

"What has Communism got to do with your ideal socialism?"

"Communism is the step, the means, toward complete socialism. We believe that through Communism the world will arrive at socialism. Communism is the rule of the worker, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It is the control of government by a single class, the largest class. Socialism is the equality of rule by all mankind, the labor of the individual for the good of the whole.

"This is the means to world socialism. First comes Communism, the rule of the working class, after capitalism, the rule of a small moneyed class. Communism will sweep the world, the workers will seize the power which is theirs by right. You know our motto, which you see on our red flag: Prolyetarii Vcekh Stran, Soedinyaites! There it is on this twenty-kopek coin. Prolétariat de tout le monde, unissez-vous!

"Now we have begun on this step. We have organized our land. There is no more Russia. There is the Union of Soviet Republics. Each race, each language, each people has a state to govern. That state encourages the language of its people, makes its own laws, and elects its own governing body. It sends representatives to Moscow. There the great policies of the Union are decided by these representatives. Unfortunately we have the outside world to consider.

"Our ideal Communism shall be a world similar to the Union. When the workers have arisen, the whole world shall be divided, as we have divided our lands, into republics, according to race and language. There will be a German Federated Socialist Soviet Republic, a French, an English, an American. The world will be under the dictatorship of the Proletariat. There will be some great central capital, Moscow, or New York, or London, where representatives of the world republics will settle differences between them. After that is accomplished, the world will proceed to ideal socialism as a natural process."

Frieda was interrupted by a charmingly petulant wail from her companion. We hadn't paid much attention to her, so wrapped up were we in Frieda. She was Frieda's hostess, and deserved more attention. "I cannot understand French. I wish you would speak Russian. I do not enjoy all this la-la-la."

She was small and pretty in a delicate way, with little mannerisms, delicious handclasps, lovely cockings of tiny brown-braided head. She smiled at us, and she was irresistible. Even if she *was* married, we made Frieda translate for her after that.

"Ma Frieda, we must have wine. This is a great occasion, too great for beer. We shall toast Comrade Nikolai, and the success of your beautiful ideal. In fact, we shall go even further. We shall toast you and Madame in champagne!"

"Yes?" said Frieda, smiling, her own lovely self again. It was curious how she could change to the Spirit of Revolution and back again to the Spirit of a Young Man's Dream. Red Revolution raised its gory head once more, putting to flight the Dream girl.

"Tell me this. Why do you always preach blood, and warfare, and assassination?"

Frieda's eyes opened wide at this. The little madame clasped her hands on her breast in horror. "We do not want war. We are for world peace. We do not want blood. We are against the killing of one's comrades. We want only revolution, world revolution. We wish for a bloodless revolution, but alas, that is not always possible. We are for the inalienable rights of man, only that. We wish to bring peace to the world, this world which leans to war."

"But everybody thinks you want war. You speak so much of revolution and, to us, revolution means all that is horrible."

"To us Revolution means freedom. Freedom for man. To show you that we don't want war, our minister Litvinoff, at the Geneva Conference, made a proposal that all the nations should scrap completely all armaments. Russia would be the first to do that if the other nations would follow. What happened? He was laughed at!

"No, we are for world peace, the rule of the working classes over the whole world as the road to socialism. Our Red Star is the symbol of Revolution. The five points: Revolution in five continents! Then peace for the war-torn world!

"But we have our troubles. We are laughed at. What can one do with such a world?"

"Why not leave it alone?" said Harry, but he said it under his breath, for Frieda was a beautiful woman. He loved to hear her talk, to watch her lightning transformations. "You've told us all about the theoretical; now tell us about the practical. What is Communism in Russia to-day? What is it doing?"

We were to see later the visible signs of the System with a new understanding. For many things of great importance have already been done. "We have emancipated Labor, we have endowed it with a dignity which it holds in no other land." That was true. The Russian workman seems *proud* to work with his hands, proud to be allowed to toil day after day at back-breaking jobs. No one is exempt from work. There seems to be a thrill of accomplishment which does not depend for its intensity upon the pay check.

"We believe in a forty-hour week. We have found that more work is done in less time if the worker has leisure. We allow vacations from time to time, short trips at reduced railroad rates to Moscow, Leningrad, and to all the big cities." Now we knew the reason for that long line at Samarkand, with the signed slips of paper. They were workers taking a tour to Moscow. "We have established government rest camps, at which workers may spend a month in the summer at the State's expense. There is a rest camp here in Osh, across the river."

Later we met a man at the usual Sovtorgflot tea who was staying at that camp. His name was Maxim Charsky, actor, boxer, sailor, poet, traveler. He filled us with beer, strung us a line of very bad French telling us of the dangers of our route, and took us to his place. It was just a glorified summer resort club and boys' camp, with opportunity for every kind of enjoyment. There was a huge auditorium, where boxing and wrestling, amateur theatricals and games were held, also movies and lectures. Tennis courts, a football field, a large swimming pool, and a modern gymnasium tempted the athletic, a good library the sedentary. Couples walked arm in arm under the thick trees, or held hands on secluded benches. The food was wonderful; we tried it. It would be hard to find a more perfect spot for a vacation.

"Well, Frieda, does a worker come to these camps alone?"

"Oh, no, he brings his family at the State's expense. And he is given full pay while he is there."

"Gosh, I'd like to stay awhile! But what else are you doing?"

"Alas, to-morrow I must go back to Andijan where my brother is commandant. I am— Oh, you mean the State? We provide education for all, free and equal education. And concerts, and museums. Everyone must learn to read and write." The school in the yard at Samarkand!

"Take an example. I, I wish to be a doctor. I have no money. I could make a good ditch-digger. But I have ambition. How do I do it?"

"There is a job for everyone in this world which he alone can do best. If you want to study medicine, we give you that opportunity. If you prove by your lack of intelligence that you cannot qualify, you must find the work best suited for you. If you are intelligent, you study at the expense of the State when you cannot pay. Who is to decide? You make your own decision, and if you cannot, the State makes it. When you are old, and can work no longer, you will be taken care of by the State. You do not need to amass a fortune for your old age. Since you are unhampered by necessity for money, the choice of your profession is free. Since your children are educated by the State, you do not need to be always chasing rubles. Your worries are vanished and you can work at your best without the need for money."

"What about this marriage business? I've heard a lot of rumors on the subject, but I can't get it straight."

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State. Now, to be married, one has to sign up with the registrar of the village soviet. To be divorced at the wish of either party one has only to appear before the same official. We have emancipated women, and given them the rights of men. Children born of the union may be raised by the parents, or if the parents are working, the State takes care of them when the parents have not the time. In case of a divorce, the children may go to either parent or to the State if the parents cannot support them. Parents, in time of trouble or need, may leave their children with the State, and may have them back when they can take care of them again. There are no illegitimates any more. A union, whether legalized or not, makes a child equal to children born in wedlock; he takes the name of the father and nothing is thought of it.

"Of course, there are a great many who still believe in religion and want a church wedding. The Soviet Union is a free land, and what its people believe is a personal matter. Both the Mohammedan and the Christian churches are very strong, and have many followers. No one interferes with beliefs. But we of the Communist faith, we of the Party and we who aspire to the Party have no believe in outworn superstitions or religious doctrines. That is one prerequisite of Party membership."

How perfectly delightful, this marriage racket! How convenient for the male!

"But all is not so easy for the man. He must pay one-third of his income to the State for the raising of his children. If he does not, he is liable to arrest and fine."

"Speaking of arrest, what does Gay-Pay-Oo mean?"

"Gosudarstvenoye Politicheskoye Utrazhdenie. Government Political Bureau. That body enforces the policies of the State, and watches over the people. It prevents counter-revolution, searches out treason, and reports corruption. It examines prisoners who are suspected of plots. Its work is swift and sure, and rarely does it make a mistake."

"Now, Frieda, you are getting into it. You say that yours is a free country, and yet you have a deadly spy system. You proclaim freedom for all, but you massacre capitalists and the old nobility. You calmly announce the right of man to his own opinion, and you just as calmly enforce by terrorism your own opinions."

"We massacre no one. You are very, very wrong. We hold the State as supreme, and the State's enemies should be exterminated. But only after a fair trial do we punish. There is but one capital crime, treason. That includes bribery and corruption of all kinds. For that, death. For other crimes the maximum sentence is ten years. We shoot the czarists because they cannot refrain from treason. But we kill no one without good reason."

"But you scare them so that their lives are a constant misery. You starve them, you take away their money, you reduce them to poverty. We met an old lady somewhere, a ci-devant capitalist, who was forced to live with her family of five on fifty rubles a month. Do you call that freedom?"

"Oh, she probably was a dangerous member of society. She must have been mixed up in a plot. We fight those people. We have no sympathy for them. We believe that Communism is the right way, and believing that, we know that the world will be happier under it. Only by force can it be adopted by all the people. We shall change the minds of the people by force, and the people will choose it when they have realized that it is the noblest way to live. The Russian people are backward, industrially and mentally. We are pushing them forward by our force, until they have developed up to our level. When they have been forced to believe what is best for them, they will believe."

"Well, it seems to me that the only way you can do this is by education. You will have to discard the present generation and mold the future as you wish. Then you will succeed."

"That is just what we are doing. We are taking the children of four and five years out of a backward home environment, and placing them in schools. There they live in an unselfish communistic way. They have their little committees, their little soviet, their common good. When they are grown, they will be Communist at heart, for they will never have learned the greed for money. They will be taught idealism and unselfishness and altruism from their babyhood."

"You might be able to do it that way. But I'm still from Missouri. We'll be back in forty years to see how it turns out. Now, let's go to the Sovtorgflot to tell George about the horses. Do you want any dessert? No? All right, we don't either. By the way, what does Sovtorgflot mean?"

"That is one of the examples of how we have improved the language. We have shortened it, thrown out four letters, and made it much easier. That stands for Sovietskoi Torgovnei Flot, the Soviet Mercantile Marine. This company handles all the transportation of the Union."

George listened very carefully to Frieda, the friend of the great. He learned definitely just what we wanted: Item, four horses to Kashgar with saddles; item, one guide who spoke Russian. "What, no Russian-speaking guides? Only Uzbek? Well, we have a Hindustani dictionary. Try to get us some one who knows Hindustani. That will have to do."

George promised to make the final arrangements the next morning, with the help of Gorby's horse-order, and to make them cheap. Perhaps it was Frieda's eyes that did the trick. And then we took Frieda home, for she had to catch the early bus to Andijan.

"One moment, chérie, before you go. I want to ask a theoretical question. Let us consider two men, Ivan Ivanovitch and Vasilli Vasilyevitch. Ivan has a farm. He grows grain. He can grow a lot of grain. He can grow enough grain for the whole village if he works hard. And Vasilli makes shoes. He makes good shoes. He can make ten pairs of shoes in a day, if he puts his mind to it. Now under capitalism Ivan grows much grain because he can sell it and buy his wife a new Ford to take her to church. He is proud of his wife and likes to see her better dressed than other wives. Vasilli makes ten good pairs of shoes because he can sell them and buy himself a gold watch to show off to the neighbors. He likes to be thought better than his neighbors. But under Communism Ivan's grain and Vasilli's shoes bring him nothing. What is to prevent Comrade Ivan from growing just enough grain for himself? What is to keep him from being lazy, and spending his time playing chess and drinking vodka when he should be tilling his fields? What possible reason is there for Vasilli to work hard all day, when he can make two pairs of shoes, close his shop, and go fishing? Why should he not work just barely enough to get by?"

Frieda's answer involved some sort of committee which would judge whether old Ivan, and lazy Vasilli were doing their best. "Laziness is a state of health. If these two were healthy, as they would be under the System, they would not think of loafing."

"Yes, but what has Vasil of the ten shoes over Vasil of the two?"

"He has the knowledge, the thrill, that he has worked well and faithfully for his comrades."

"But, my dear young lady, you can't change human nature in a day."

"That is the reason for the educational program. We make every one equal, and we change them all together."

"It seems to me that you have done nothing but degrade. You have lowered the standard of living, and you have abolished even those few who were well off. Look at our friend Nick. Seven living in one room. Look at George, a gentleman if there ever was one. Four of the family and two friends in a room. Is that progress?"

"I will illustrate." Frieda held up her strong little hand. "You see these five fingers. They represent five classes of society. The thumb, the shortest, is the rabotchik, the worker in the industrial center. The little finger is the Kristian, the farmer who leases his land from his overlord. The third finger is for the kulak, the rich farmer who owns his land. The first finger, here, the little capitalist, the storekeeper who profits by trade and speculation. The middle finger stands for the rich capitalist and for the nobility. We do this. We cut these three middle fingers off here, at the level of the little one. We place it on the thumb. We raise the level of the industrial worker, and we make all the fingers of equal length. When we have succeeded—which, alas, we have not yet done—we lengthen all five fingers the same amount. We lower the standard of living for some, raise it for others, until it is the same for all. Then we lift the whole together.

"We do not raise it too far. We believe in the simple life. We stand for sport, and the development of the body. We are against luxury. We eat plain, good food, we drink plain, simple drinks, we live out of doors when we can. We do all our own work, we have no servants. We have no soft beds, no soft chairs, no toilets, no delicacies. We are hard. We live hard, we work hard, we drink hard, we love hard."

There was a certain glory lent to the picture by her words, and by the way she said them. It must be a wonderful way of life! Simple, clean, wholesome, without the complexities of civilization. We could enjoy that way of living for a while. We could thrill at the nobility of the simple. The untutored savage all tutored! It would be fine for a few years, especially with a girl like—"Frieda," said Harry, impulsively, "let's get married. To-night!" But Frieda didn't hear. She was busy, very busy, saying good-by to Pete.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SULEIMAN'S CITY

"Stop!"——

Official Voice of the Sultan

SULEIMAN the Magnificent was growing old. And with old age came a great weariness. The brilliant whirl of his court no longer amused him. The thrilling call to war left him cold and unmoved. He was tired of life.

The legend tells how his ministers were worried. They called in the best physicians of the world. But the learned doctors could do nothing. The mighty Suleiman was bowing to age, he who had bowed to no man during his eventful life. "He needs a change," said the doctors, as doctors will.

When this was suggested to the Sultan, his tired eyes shone for a moment at the thought. "Yes," he announced, "I must travel. I will go to the East. I will not stop until I have reached the East."

Istamboul was in an uproar at the preparations for the journey. The Grand Vizier himself attended carefully to the details. The rich stores of the bazaars were combed to find suitable presents for the princes along the route. The best horses that money could buy were obtained. Camels were tested over the deserts of Asia Minor. The finest silks were cunningly fashioned into the Sultan's personal pavilion. Greatest care was exercised in choosing the outfit. For was not this to be a march of triumph for Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of All the Ottomans, lineal descendant of Mahmud the Prophet of God? "It will be a journey for pleasure," announced the Official Voice of the Sultan. "Only forty-two regiments shall accompany him. He is not contemplating war. As this is a trip for pleasure, arrangements are to be made to take thirty-five of his wives, and two hundred of his best concubines."

Suleiman left Istamboul amid the shouts of the Faithful. He sailed up the Bosporus and turned to the East. Having set his face toward the rising sun, he never looked back.

Through the country of the fierce Turkomans, who ride through the black sands near the Aral Sea, passed Suleiman. Into the land of the mighty Persians he made his way. Across the trackless deserts of Transcaspia the great throng moved among countless dangers. The glories of Merv, Queen of the Kara-Kum, the wisdom of holy Bokhara, the wealth of green-curled Samarkand were all noticed by this great Sultan of the West. He rested for a time in Samarkand, to pay homage to Lord Timur, the Earth Shaker, that hero who had conquered his great-great-grandfather, the first Suleiman, son of Bayazid. The green groves of Samarkand were pleasant after the dusty face of the desert, and he was tired. But soon, with the inconsistency of the aged, he wearied of the inactivity. He ordered his concubines to pack their things, and again turned his face resolutely eastward.

New hardships met him, at every step new dangers threatened the courage of his following. The desert was endless. Water was scarce. The forty-two regiments had dwindled to twenty. The camels were worn out. Horses died every day. The food supply was fast disappearing. And worst of all, out of two hundred picked and guaranteed concubines, only a scant fifty remained. But never for a moment did the old man waver. Eastward, ever eastward, with a grim, fixed purpose, he led them on, stifling murmurs from his men. "Allah is merciful. Put your trust in Him." He spurred them forward.

After what seemed an endless time, the desert suddenly opened. Suleiman the Mighty climbed to a little hillock, and looked before him, wiping the dust from his eyes. A wide, green valley lay below, calling to his tired body. Through it a milky stream rushed madly, to disappear in the desert. Birds sang among shady groves; butterflies colored like the rainbow fluttered over the yellow grass. Around the valley lay the desert, threatening, foreboding, bleak. Behind the desert, beyond the valley, a range of snow-capped mountains lifted their heads into Heaven itself. "Truly," said Suleiman, "this is a sign from Allah. This is His reward for our labors."

Down into the shade rushed the Sultan's following, to pick the juicy melons which grew wild in the grass, to drink deep of the icy waters of the river, to lie in peace under the tall poplars.

In the center of the valley were two lofty rocks, natural monuments to the glory of Allah who had made it all. The Sultan pitched his pavilion between them, and prepared to spend a quiet night.

But the Grand Vizier was worried. He feared that his Mighty Master would not stop for long. He was afraid that the Sultan would attempt those dim mountains with their treacherous snows. He approached his Lord tremulously.

"O Sire, Lord of Heaven and Earth, Defender of the Faith, Prince of Peace and Protector of the Poor, what do we do now? Do we move on to-morrow over those impassable snows? Do we attempt again the dangers of the way?"

The Sultan shook off a concubine or two, and cleared his throat. He too was tired of travel. Allah had given him this valley as a reward for his hardship. Would it do to tempt the Will of Allah, even if mighty Suleiman was Mahmud's offspring? "My inflexible Word is this. Go tell it to my people. My Word is Osh! Stop! Allah has rewarded me. On the tallest of these two rocks will I build a shrine for the eternal glory of Allah the One God, and Mahmud, my ancestor, His Prophet. The shrine that I build shall be Holiest of the Holy. It shall cure the sick, heal the lame. And because I have a very bad headache just now, and because my back is very sore, that shrine shall be especially effective in curing headaches and sore backs. Go, give my Word to the people. Osh! This is the end of our journey!"

The Grand Vizier ran out of the Presence shouting the welcome news. "Osh! The Sultan says to Osh! We're going to Osh here while he builds a shrine, and then we're going to see Istamboul once more. Osh!" The Vizier was a very undignified man when he forgot himself.

The legend goes on to say that Suleiman built his shrine, and returned to Istamboul, leaving some of his men to found a city. He left also most of his concubines, who made very good wives away from the temptations of the court. And for four hundred years that shrine has been particularly efficacious in healing headaches and backaches, according to the inflexible Word of Suleiman the Magnificent, who received his Power directly from his ancestor Mahmud, at the very foot of the Golden Throne.

You can see those two rocks for miles, from any point on the distant rim of the valley. They rise sheer from the flat green floor of the plain like lofty monuments to Allah, their Maker. One of them is steep and round, a solid monolith of battered stone; the other lies in a long sweep of ridge to the westward. On the top of the round one is a squat dome of gray, nestling near a tripod. Over the tripod floats a brown yak's tail.

It was Luba who first told us to see the mountain. "You should very not miss the seeing of Suleiman's mountain. It would be of interest to you." We met Luba by a lucky chance. We passed by a house on the way to the Gay-Pay-Oo and Comrade Yerokhin. An old woman sat on the doorstep with a scrimey little boy. She saw us, and called.

"You are American?" Apparently the fame of our expedition had spread through the whole of Osh. We mustered our fantastic German and replied that we were.

"My daughter speaks English. Come back at two o'clock. She will be here." English at Osh! We could not miss that.

We waited until the time, stifling our excitement. Here at last was someone who could answer our questions. We hardly enjoyed the icy swim with Shorty for thinking about meeting her. We rushed through a tour of the big silk factories, seeing immense piles of drying cocoons, complicated machinery, and the curious weaving of the craftsmen of the district, with only a passing interest.

We did come out of our fog for strictly business reasons. At the Sovtorgflot some ten Uzbeks had gathered for us. The horse papers were to be signed. George had crashed through. He introduced us to all of them. We recognized the tall yellow of the Eastern Garden, but passed over the rest with the usual Uzbek salute. One of them, however, stepped forward. "This is your provodnik," said George.

His name was Ashura Akhoon. He was only twenty-four, he said, but he looked forty. He was tall, very tall, and his height was accentuated by a gigantic black and white sheepskin hat. He had a shy grin, which was given a note of sorrow by the drooping parentheses of mustaches. We liked him at once, not realizing the deceit which can lie under the open smile of a native. The papers were signed with due ceremony. One of the yellows was illiterate, and so he was carefully finger-printed by George. It reminded us of some glorified Bertillon ceremony. He submitted with the easy grace of the professional prisoner.

"Ashura Akhoon, we do not like your name. We will wear our throats out clearing them on that name. From now on, you shall be called after your illustrious ancestor, who came down from the Steppes and Stairways of the desert to be King of All Men. You shall be Genghis Khan."

George said the Khan would buy all the food, provide equipment, and bring the horses around the next day for our departure. We dismissed all worry with this news, paid over the absurdly small sum of fifty dollars, and went for another swim with George's whole family. That arduous training in the art of Soviet Swimming at Batoum and Baku had made us inclined to carry things too far. Even Shorty of the Perfect Physique turned his back when a lady strolled by on the road beside the river. But we were made of sterner stuff. No false modesty for us!

At last the hour approached when we were to speak English once more. We presented ourselves to the German lady. Luba came forward.

Luba was unquestionably Hebraic. Her large nose hung over the wide mouth of the Jew, her wavy black hair was tied back, and fell behind in a thick mass. She could hardly be called beautiful, or even pretty, and yet she had the sweetness of extreme youth, and a kindness in her large dark eyes. Her voice was low and soft. "I 'ave always want to speak with American people. My cousin and I talk the English in Tashkent, and we say we always wish to meet English boys."

We settled ourselves and began eating grapes. "They are so, so cheap here," intoned Luba.

Perhaps we were a bit ungracious to Luba. We had not known what to expect and we were surprised to say the least. But Luba was the best-hearted thing in the world, and knew English astonishingly well, in spite of having learned it at a commercial school in Tashkent, her home town. She was preparing for a job in the foreign department of a bank.

Luba did a lot of explaining for us, and answered all our questions fully, especially on the subject of Osh and Uzbek women. We were interested in the women who paddled along the street past the window, wearing that absurdly large, square black veil. We did want just one look behind the veil, and we mentioned this to Luba. She remembered some months later when she wrote us:

To: Mr. Henry Alfred Schroeder
33 East 39th Street
Dated: 14th of November Tashkent
Dear Sir:

Some days ago I write a letter to Your Esteemed Friend wishing to know how well was your voyage and are you already in America or not? It is very desirable for me to know these. Besides this, I remembering that You have no photo of an Usbekska woman without a shoil (parandja) have got such a photo and enclose them for You, herewith. It was very difficult to get the photo's. I was obliged to engage a photographer and went with him to the old city of Tashkent, there I applied to one woman, then to another, but they explained me that I must receive a permission from their husbands, otherwise it was impossible. I got it and the photo's are at last, at my hands.

The woman, as You see, is with a parandja on her shoulders, that is a heavy veil made from the hair of a horse. She is very pretty, but her life is full of tragedy, which she don't understand herself: 12 years of age she was married, on the picture she is only sixteen years old and her husband is fifty. It is terrible! You must, however, know that it is a very, very great progress that an Usbekska woman, and chiefly her husband let her to be photographed openly!!

Now our Government give an order according to which a girl of 16 can be married, not younger. It is very well for them, besides this, many, many of them, threw away their parandja, which made from them slaves. Without punishment, without orders, only by explaining their terrible life, our Government made them free women! There are (how) now many schools for them, where they are learning their own language and Russian too. After sometimes, I hope, they will hardly believe themselves that they live so and wear such shoils!

Now I want to request You if it is possible to send me some pairs of the best French-threaded stockings we can not get here nothing of silk well threaded. But each pair must be worn once or twice and then our Custom House will not take great tolls and so I can be able to get them. Please, excuse me, but You, Yourself asked me what You can buy for me and so You are punished. I resolved to request You about that.

My aunt too begged me to write You: she has some months ago written a letter to her old friend, but in vain, because, as You will see from the enclosed herewith envelope, she was not founded. Be so kind, if it is not very difficult find her, she has a property. I think, that You, however having many impressions have not forgotten the little Middle Asiatic Town—Osh and me. So you will kindly answer me.

Awaiting Your kindly answer
I remain, Sir,
Yours very truly Luba—

P. S. My mother and brothers send you their best compliments. If I am not mistaken You have told me, that You have a sister which I dare to send my best compliments.

Excuse my bad English and please correct my mistakes.

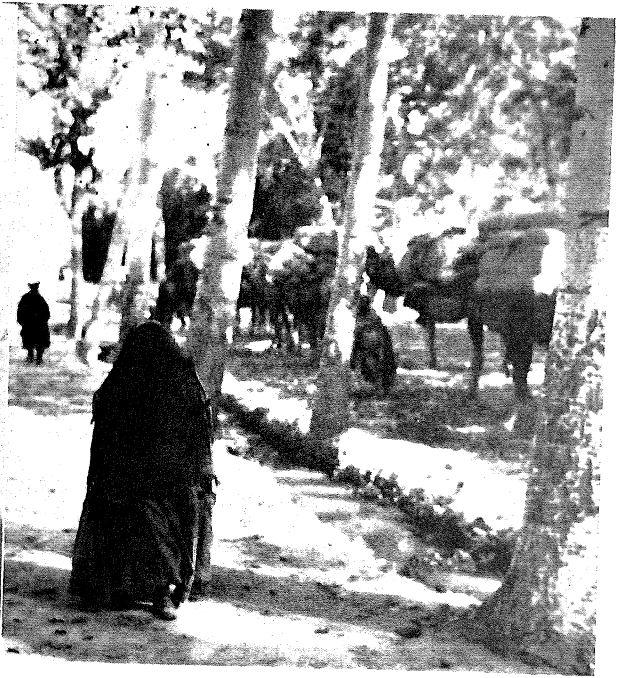
Enclosed was a picture of a beautiful girl and a torn scrap of envelope with a lot of Russian on it and:

America
New York

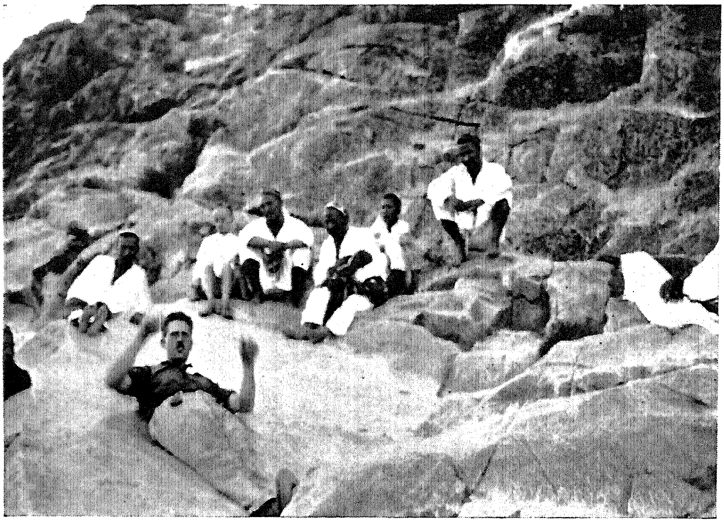
Mrs. Schwartz
Bronx

Returned to sender. Not found.

"Her life is full of tragedy."



"That absurdly large, square black veil."



"Pete's sore back was cured." (*Page* 175)

"The papers were signed with due ceremony." (*Page* 167)

Luba was kind and considerate, and oh, so excited at meeting members of that fabled race, the American. She chatted on and on, about America, about Russia, about everything, making shy little inquiries when our speech happened to lapse into the vernacular. She knew nothing of the spoken language, and it was a joy to hear Luba's "commercial" English. We filled up on grapes, grew restless. We wanted to see things. Luba sensed our desire to sight-see and offered to do her best for us. "You must see the Suleiman's mountain. I am alas very tired. I have been selling shoes all day to the Uzbekska women. But this is my little brother, dear Isaac. He will show you."

Dear Isaac was the epitome of all that is worst in little brothers. He had every fault known to younger males, and any one of those faults could have served to inspire the saying: "When God made pretty girls, why did He have to make little brothers?" It would be difficult to find a more measly, scrawny, conceited kid than Ike. He grinned with malice and greeted us. "Ai speek Eengleesh. See? Ai very good."

"Like hell you are!" said Pete, after we had left the sister. Pete was right. He ran along beside us, asking if we wanted to take a ride in a feidung. That we were unable to understand. No money was to be spent on him. We would make him walk even if we ourselves dropped.

He took us the long, dusty way toward the great massive rock, trotting and chattering like some insane monkey. We crossed the old city, buying a large melon to eat on the top. "Do you want to carry this, young feller?"

"Ai very good. Good-by, hello," retorted Ike, calmly. We turned to the left into a deep grove of trees, climbed over a fence, and came upon an ancient beggar sitting cross-legged by the path. The beggar was blind. He heard us, and moaned piteously, stretching forth his hands. Ike mischievously stole his turban, sending the poor fellow into cries of rage. We caught Ike and lectured him severely on cruelty to the blind. "Ai very good," said Ike, with a gleam in his eye. "Hello?"

The way led winding up the face of the rock. It was quite a struggle. As it was Sunday, or rather Friday, the Faithful, young and old, were scrambling up the steep, tortuous path. We saw a fat, puffing graybeard lying on his stomach on the edge of a high step hauling up a troop of youngsters. "Good-by," panted little Ike, slipping down ten feet.

The top! We caught our breath. The world was spread before us.

Far to the southeast through the haze of the distance rose a vast crescent of dim, snowy peaks. At the center lofty white heads lost themselves in the misty clouds. The horns of the crescent stretched far to the sides, sloping imperceptibly into the green of grassy mountains, into the brown of barren hills, finally vanishing in the tumble of desert mounds.

Enclosed by these vague, sweeping limits was the dusty green star of the valley, which lay, tranquilly serene, amid the yellow tumult of the rolling plain. Allah had made here an eternal symbol of the Turkish faith, a gigantic star and crescent upon the face of the earth.

To the west and north shimmered the brown desert, fading gradually into the dull white of the sky. From behind a rolling ridge the thin line of the river appeared, lost itself in the valley, sprang again from a point of the star, and flung its wavy head at the foot of the white peaks.

Rightly was this valley named "Stop." The glimmering sea of desert seemed to converge into this huge semicircle of mountain. In a mad confusion of waves it poured into those curved confines, and beat in rising floods against the still, cold barrier of the range. The wide horizon itself narrowed and ceased at this snowy obstacle.

Allah had made a symbol, and Suleiman had come out of the west to glorify its maker by the tiny graystone dome, the long covered porch, and the four converging wooden posts on the summit of his mountain. The Soviets, who cared not for Allah, had swept through the desert, and nailed the Red Flag of Revolution to the peak of those posts.

The Faithful still flock to Suleiman's shrine. From their little mud-brick huts far below, they climb painfully to the summit on their Friday pilgrimage. For still, according to the inflexible Will of Allah as interpreted and edited by Suleiman, his Word on Earth, the holy place is extremely efficacious for the Absolution of Sins, for the curing of Headaches, and for the relief of Sore Backs.

There are ingenious modi operandi in this process. For the mere matter of sins, you walk around and around the "four-legged tripod" touching each post and repeating a formula. If that treatment doesn't work, you walk around the top of the mountain. For an aching head, there is a depression worn bowl-shaped in the rock. You put your head in, stooping over, and you are cured. For backs there is a slide in the rock about ten feet long, also worn as smooth as glass by the thousands of bodies which have used it for four hundred years. You sit at the top, lean back, and let yourself go. Or at another smooth depression, you lie down and give the ailment a longer treatment. This latter may also be used for stomach-ache.

But you cannot leave without visiting the shrine for a free trip to heaven. You walk along the shaded porch, distributing coins to the squatting mullahs who line the way. You reach a low, arched doorway, stoop, and enter. The inside is dark and bare of ornament, except for a square white tablet set in the rock wall. On the smooth stone floor, before the tablet, are three little holes, shallow and glossy, in a triangle. You kneel in two of these, and bump your head in the third, following the ancient rule. Thousands of the Faithful have worn these holes sleek since Suleiman first knelt and bumped.

It is a tiny place, scarce high enough to stand in, cut out of the solid rock. It is cold in there, and the greasy walls drip sweat. You see nothing extraordinary but the tablet, and you turn and go out, giving more coins to the tea-drinking mullahs, who bow and thank you in chorus.

We sat on the top of the mountain above the dome and broached the melon. Ike had been most irreverent to the graybeards, teasing them and mocking their benedictions. He had the contempt of the young for age-old tradition. We had dragged him away by the scruff of his neck. "Ai very good," he screamed as we paddled him before those whom he had insulted.

We watched the long line of Uzbek men and women appearing from around the mountain and sliding down the slide below us. They looked like nothing more than a crowd of children at play in the municipal park. "I'm going to try that slide," said Pete, and began to scramble down.

"Now listen, Pete. They might not like it. And besides, it looks too much like Halliburton. We've tried to keep away from this 'Road to Romance' stuff, and being photographed in shorts before the Taj Mahal."

"Oh, well, once won't matter. We can suppress the picture if we want to. I've got a very sore back, and I want to try it out on the Moslems."

"All right, go ahead. I won't be responsible. You'd better get permission first."

Ike saw how our intentions lay, and was off with a shout. "Ai very good," he yelled, sliding on his back, his stomach, his head. The Uzbeks merely sat around and grinned. They didn't seem to take their religion very seriously.

We finished with the slide and went back to finish the melon. Pete's "sore back" was cured, owing doubtless to the wavy bumps in the rock. A lovely Russian girl sat near us with an old man. Ike grinned at her, and whispered, "Look. Girl no good. Bad girl. Takes money. Not good." Ike seemed a precocious little devil.

"Offer her some melon," retorted Harry.

Ike did so, with a backward fling, "Ai very good." But Ike must have been wrong. She refused the melon.

We went back to the city with Ike dragging at our heels. He was very tired, so tired that he stopped singing "Ai very good," at every opportunity. But the inexorable youngster revived when we left him with his sister and went to say good-by to Nick. "See? Hello!" he shouted at our quickly retreating backs.

The old bug-hunter either believed thoroughly in modern communism, or was a perfect host. We had cost him no little time, trouble, and money by staying with him. We had paid very little attention to him, so wrapped up were we in ourselves and what we were doing. We offered to pay him in full for his hospitality, following the usual custom of uninvited guests. Nick was insulted. "You are my friends," he said, severely. "I do not accept money from my friends."

Of course we had to have the gallon or so of tea with George. And then we had to drink beer and more beer with Charsky, the actor, and walk it off through the gardens. We ran into the whole Sovtorgflot family, and were treated to the movies, a weird, lurid tale about gypsies, a tall, bulgy-eyed hero, a fierce, passionate heroine, who was the daughter of a bear-tamer and who did a little taming herself on the sly. George said it was a good movie, but the beer kept us asleep most of the time. The beer also put us to sleep on George's floor and pillows, in spite of the severe tummy-ache of George's little boy, who had eaten too much ice-cream.

According to the Inflexible Rule of Lenin we had to submit to the customs examination the next morning. We were so full of Nick's coffee and George's tea that we didn't much care what happened, but we suspected that our things were carefully gone over more for curiosity than for duty. There was a tall, strongly built, black-bearded man in charge. Somehow he had a vague suggestion of the nautical about him. He appropriated a handful of Harry's best "Walnut Blend" tobacco, substituting some black, shaggy "Rooski" in its stead. We were not surprised when he told us that he had been captain of a merchantman before the war; you can tell a seafaring man even in the center of Asia.

"Oh, you have a gun. Where's your permit?" the other man asked. He was a bit scowly. And he tried to annoy. "What, no permit? Bad, very bad!"

"It's all right," said the seafaring man. "Just take it around to Comrade Yerokhin. He'll write you one!" He drew a lungful of Harry's tobacco, and smiled contentedly. In fact, he put his feet up on the desk.

"What's this?" demanded the scowly gentleman. Red and green boxes all carefully sealed were dubiously examined. "Wrigley's Spearmint, the Perfect Gum." We hauled out the dictionary. But believe it or not, it is no small task to explain the use of chewing-gum to a couple of Russians. "Chew," we told them. "Don't swallow. Just chew." We illustrated, and begged them to try. They champed industriously for a few minutes.

"How long chew?" asked the bearded man.

"Pete, listen. How long do you chew gum anyway?"

"Oh, I don't know. Half an hour, I guess." Upon receiving this information, the mean-looking man spat disdainfully, but the sea-captain had traveled, and he was a man of courage. He pulled out his watch and set it before him.

The commandant wrote a permit for a Winchester high-power, cut-down army rifle without a murmur. He put us in charge of the Commissar for the Suppression of Anticommunist Propaganda, who examined our books.

As they were written in English for the most part he got very little out of them, but he went through the form in all seriousness.

At last all was over, and we repacked, giving presents of gum and toilet paper to all concerned. "Red" tape was cut for us and we were free to go. They had overlooked our diaries, which were hanging in our coats at George's. They had taken nothing, made no demands. We needed only to get our rubles changed into Chinese money, and we would be off. We were heaving an inward sigh of relief when there was a sudden commotion from the corner where the black-bearded man was sitting. He began to cough and sputter. And then he smiled and rubbed his stomach. He had swallowed his gum. The half-hour was up.

The Dzudarin of Chinese Sinkiang was a kindly man. He had passed a law that the penalty of counterfeiting was death. Humanely, he wished to save his weak subjects from temptation. With keen insight he made another law, that all money was to be printed in notes of the smallest denomination. When we came forth from the Bank of Russia, we had changed a hundred and fifty rubles each, for a hundred and twenty of these darned Chinese "ser." It made a package ten inches by six inches, weighing close to a pound. Thus is temptation averted in Chinese Turkestan.

"Come in," said George with a broad grin. "Sit down." We caught a glimpse of a loaded table.

"Harry, old man. It's pretty darned nice of George to give us a dinner. How about slipping down to the store and seeing what the place offers in the shape of hooperdooper?" Harry ran, and appeared a few moments later with three large bottles, of the five-gold-star variety.

The dinner remains somewhat of a haze to us. Perhaps melons were served, and cutlets, and rice; perhaps pig's knuckles and sauerkraut. It was all owing to that infernal Russian custom of drinking bottoms up. George had lots of beer, and several bottles of wine; Harry had provided the five-star cognac. Teacups were used for transferring contents from bottles to willing stomachs, and George very soon taught us that no one in Russia who considers himself a man ever leaves one drop behind after he has once lifted the cup to the lip. There were many, many toasts, and much, much silent and severe drinking. George was at his best, and Shorty sat stolidly with his hand wrapped around a cup. Al beamed and beamed, and treated us to the music of his deep, rich voice. Mrs. George sat trying to resist George's repeated offers of "jus' one lil drink. It won't hurt you." George's little boys glooped soup and looked bored. The Expedition grew more and more expansive.

It was a glorious party. It was supposed to be a celebration of the birthday of George's young heir, but it resolved itself into a highly concentrated discussion. We talked of the future of the world in halting syllables until the words in the conversation book mixed themselves in a meaningless jumble. After that we just talked. It didn't matter much what was said, for everyone talked at once. Pete remembered later that Harry had made a long and serious confession in fervent English to Mrs. George concerning some "dame named Katy" whom he seemed to like; Harry feels certain that what Pete said to Al about Russians had nothing to do with Russian men.

Like a ghost from the tomb a gigantic leering figure appeared in the doorway, waving a shaggy black hat. Pete's impulse was to spread the alarm through the town that the Mongols were attacking. He half rose, and the room swam before him. Harry reached for his trusty knife, resolved to defend himself to the last. The figure let out what sounded like a war-whoop. George rose and bowed. It was Genghis Khan!

"Dear ol' Gen," said Harry, leering back as evilly. "Come home at last. Geez, it's mos' five 'clock. Gotta go. Gotta start for dear ol' Kash—Kash—hell, China!"

"Yup," Pete hiccuped. "An' looka th' mos' magnif'-cent horses he's got. Three full-blood'd mount'n stallions. All rarin' t'go. Ever seen better-lookin' steeds 'n' a better-lookin' Khan. We're off inna cloud o' somethin'." Somehow we got aboard, and somehow the Khan loaded the stuff.

In a last mighty attempt we curled our tongues around elusive Russian. "We write to you, George ol' man. And we write to head office of Sovtorgflot. We tell them that Comrade Georgii Vassil—hell—vitch Yevdo—Yevdo—that at Osh there's the best Sovtorgflot in Russia." George bowed stiffly and severely, and the last we saw of him as we left the yard was one tremendous grin.

"These sure are marv'lous horses. Bes' I ever seen."

"Yeah," grinned Pete. "An' I never expect'd such smoo-ooth saddles. I think we're pretty damn lucky, if y'as' me."

We rode swaying through the town, with Genghis

Khan marching ahead silently. We reached the old city and turned through the bazaars. We seemed to have lots of horses, oh, lots and lots of them. The Khan stopped. An ancient, wrinkled graybeard came up and saluted. Gen began to talk.

"What the hell does he want, Harry?"

"I think he wants six rubles for bread."

"Listen. Didn't George say the Khan was gonna get th' food?"

"Sure, but—that's why we on'y got tea 'n' sugar. Oh, hell! I'll give it to 'im, anyway. He's makin' too damn much noise. What's six rubles in decent money!"

The Khan disappeared, but the graybeard took his place, trudging before us leading the horses. We crossed about a dozen rivers, and went up a long, sloping hill.

"Y'know, Pete, I don't think this saddle's so hot," said Harry after a time. "The stirrups are lousy and its bumpy and hard, and damn it, my back hurts."

Pete said nothing but moaned slightly.

The hill was endless. The sun was hot. The dust from the feet of the old man choked and stifled. We kept on and on. And as the effects of the exhilaration began to be replaced by that weary, listless throbbing and that played-out feeling, the horses began to dissolve from "full-blooded mountain stallions" into very small, very skinny, very lazy, and ultra-ordinary pack animals. The saddles, once so smooth, grew harder and harder. The world was losing its roseate hue, and taking on a very drab, very dusty appearance. The expedition got sore.

"Where's Genghis Khan? He ought to be here!"

"And where's this old fool taking us? And when is he going to stop?"

He never paused. On and on toward Kashgar, with the same steady shuffling stride, kicking up clouds of gray, thick dust. Damn him! What did he think we were? Who was he anyway?

We looked back at the top of the hill as night was falling. Outlined against the red sky were those two hills, one long and sloping, the other steep and jagged, with a round gray dome on its top. We forgot our bodily discomfort for a moment. Suleiman's mountain! We were going where Suleiman never dared to go, where only Marco Polo and Genghis Khan had been. Perhaps the great Explorer had seen those mountains from this very spot, rising from the valley floor like two living monuments.

The old man trudged on through the night. Perhaps he was only taking us to his home village, to turn us over to the Khan in the morning. It grew darker and darker. We made out the dim shadows of trees by the roadside. We could barely see him before us, a bobbing black mass of cloak before the pack horse.

He stopped. A dim light glowed in a dark recess, some black hole of a house. We tumbled off, and climbed into the hole. The floor was hard-packed clay. The roof was thatched. That much we made out, that much and no more, before we fell on the clay to sleep the sleep of the sobered drunk, caring for nothing but the softness of that floor.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE PROPHET AND THE KHAN

When the camel's stomach is empty, he stretches down his neck even to the thorn-bush.

Turki Proverb

KASHGAR! On to Kashgar! The road to Kashgar! That magic word, which had inspired us with its romantic music far, far away in drab little New Haven, rang in our ears with an increasing intensity. Kashgar! It had a pleasant sound, a mysterious Eastern sound, entirely independent of its associations on a map. To us now fairly on the way, actually out of the realm of autos and railroad trains, the esoteric name seemed closer and more attainable. This was the last stage of our journey. On these same decrepit horses would we achieve our year-long dream of riding out of the West down the main street of Kashgar and into the mist of what we now considered the Unknown. Kashgar, one of the Six Cities of Asia!

We sat in the little tea-house and talked it over. The relief of finally setting out on the last leg of the trip was heartening, even at six o'clock in the morning. It was a curious place, this hotel of ours. A raised platform with a hard-mud floor was covered over by a thatched roof. It was open to the street. Two barked green posts held up the framework of branches which made the ceiling. On one side was a smoke-blackened fireplace under a gaping hole in the branches. In the ashes, still smoldering, was a black pitcher of a queer shape, like a water pitcher gone bad.

"Pete, old man! Do you realize what we have done? We have gone into the unknown beyond Osh without our guide, and consequently without our food, with nothing but this wheezy old man to rely on. What is worse, we have burned our bridges as far as Russia is concerned. We have no permission to stay here longer than is necessary to take us to the border. And once over the border, we can't go back. If Gorby's letter is a fizzle, and we can't get a visa to return into the Union, we've got to cross the Gobi. You know what that will be like with this outfit."

Pete realized the situation, but that did not trouble him. "Oh, hell! Let's not cross any bridges yet. What's done is done. We've got to go on. But this little matter of Genghis Khan, now. Where do you suppose the old he-goat is?"

"Oh, he's probably saying good-by to his wives. He may turn up before long."

"Well, I hate to trust my carcass to this old bird. Let's get some breakfast while we wait."

A white-shirted boy in a gayly colored skullcap, and an ancient, wrinkled gent prepared the breakfast. To see us there at our food would have been a study of adaptation to environment. We ate a melon, before the safe hour of noon. We drank some tea out of the flowered bowls, squatting on the ground in the true native fashion. We chewed on tough, flat cakes of dry bread, with extreme relish. Was it only a few days ago in Samarkand that we had remarked on that same bread, turning up our noses at a heap of it on the head of a peddler? Had we really believed that melons were harmful in the morning? Did we actually look down with pity upon the dirty natives who squatted with elbows on knees drinking tea, just as we were squatting and drinking now? And at Osh was it the same two people whose sense of luxury and comfort had caused them to disdain sleeping in a tea-house much more pretentious than this little black hole?

"Oh, well," said Harry. "When Genghis Khan comes with the food we'll be all right. I agree with you that this isn't a very swell meal, but we won't have to live on tea and bread after this morning. I hope Gen remembers to bring some beefsteak and onions."

"Beefsteak and onions! Don't talk about that! Let's get on the move—the Prophet seems to be worried. He's looking down the road to Osh as if his mother-in-law was coming. I guess he's expecting the Khan any minute."

A tremendous altercation followed the loading of the horses. Pete thought he knew his natives, and when the old Uzbek who ran the hotel demanded a large price for the night's lodgings, Pete put his back up and donated what he thought was right. The man sputtered, the Prophet sputtered, but the two dumb Americans would not understand. We paid for our bread and tea, and for sleeping on the mud floor, but not one kopek more would we give. The Prophet apparently wanted us to pay for his food and for the horses, but we could not speak his language, and all the Prophet could do was wheeze. At last both sides grew tired, and we mounted our rearing steeds. The hotel man saw our mettle, and shook hands with a smile and a cheery word. Such is the native of Turkestan.

Not a word did the Prophet speak. Trudging ahead through the little village, he faced directly toward the rising run, which was by now hot and glaring. Low mud-brick houses, their fronts open, other huts whose doorways were filled with merchandise, blank mud walls with trees peeping over their tops, all glimmered grayly in the dusty light of the sun. Ragged children sat stolidly in the soft dust of the street, playing without emotion. Brown-bearded natives glanced up uninterestedly as we passed, intent upon their tasks, arranging green and yellow melons in piles of rushes, stringing up on the eaves dried fish and gourds, or laying cheap cotton scarfs and filmy silk on thick rugs. We crossed a muddy brook and saw in a shady clearing a large crowd collected for market. Everyone attended unemotionally to business as we shuffled slowly onward.

We left the outskirts of the town, to plunge into the glaring yellow heat of the desert. Flat, bare expanse of clay stretched as far as we could see, relieved by occasional dim gray shrubs which only accentuated the monotonous level brilliance. Still the old Prophet trudged dustily along, and there was no sign of Genghis Khan. We began to grow tired, and yet the morning was still young. What was worse we began to grow thirsty, and the realization that there was no water only made our thirst stronger.

This first morning in the saddle was no fun. The anticipation of it had been romantic, alluring, something to do with riding carefree over the gorgeous trackless desert in close proximity to God and Nature. But we had not considered the limitations of Nature as manifested in ourselves. This thirst business had not occurred to us. We very slowly but exceedingly surely got what is known in the vernacular as "griped." "Griped" with the desert, with the stumbling, skinny horses, with the hard wooden saddles, with ourselves, but particularly with the Prophet and the Khan, that wheezing, shuffling figure ahead of us moving on so painfully before the pack horse, and that grinning, dashing young son of the desert in the huge hat, whom we had left to his own devices the night before.

There was a thud of hoofs behind, and we turned to see a horse galloping madly before a cloud of dust. The rider drew nearer, pulled abreast and smiled between parenthetical brown mustachios. It was the Khan, none other. We both gave him a dirty look.

"Where the hell have you—" began Pete, but stopped, his mouth watering. "For God's sake, it's about—" said Harry, but he too ceased the gentle reprimand, his eyes bulging. Genghis Khan knew his Westerners and his tenderfeet. He paid no attention to us, but pulled out a long knife and plunged it with a soft, squelching sound into the heart of the cool yellow melon he was carrying.

"I guess," Pete murmured a moment later through a mouthful of melon, "we needn't call the Gen down for this."

"No," said Harry, with a gentle sucking sound. "He wouldn't understand us if we did tear into him. Let's find out what the Prophet is doing around here and call it a day."

"Yes, and we'll also find out how much Russian the Khan knows. Hey, Genghis Khan, who old man? What doing?"

The fellow laughed, showing a perfect set of teeth. "Him go Kashgar. One horse him."

So that was it! We were saddled with the Prophet for the rest of the trip. One of the horses belonged to him. We would show him that we were no fools. Not one cent would we pay for the Prophet's upkeep. What business had he sponging off us? Well, we would give him none of the store of food that Genghis Khan had brought on his saddle. We would show him. But the Prophet wheezed on into the rising sun, on foot. If he wished to walk, all the way to Kashgar, he was welcome.

The dusty road sloped gently upward to the horizon of desert, and the sun beat down sharply from a cloudless copper sky. The horses plodded on, silently, painfully. A few trees appeared in the distance on the skyline, bleak and friendless. The Khan, riding ahead, quickened his pace.

We reached the trees. The Khan dismounted. "Spaht," he said in Russian, laying his two hands beside his face. But it was only ten o'clock.

"No sleep, Gen. We've got to get to Kashgar. On, Stanley, on." Harry spoke firmly, but the Khan looked unconvinced. We started our horses onward, and the Gen followed. What was his idea in bringing that up? We would have to watch him for loafing.

Perhaps the Gen was right. Perhaps he knew just a little bit more about Asiatic travel than we did. We crossed another burning expanse, passed down a narrow path in a steep bank, and came upon vastness itself.

A brown shallow river wandered in disorder over the flat floor of a desolate valley. On both sides steep cliffs bordered the level sand, cliffs worn into jagged gulches by the dry remnants of streams. Beyond the cliffs there was nothing but sky. The valley spread like a great gash of sand, yellow, dazzling sand, in both directions, endlessly, vastly, straight as some huge unbending highway through the barren waste. Far in the distance the direct lines of cliffs seemed to converge, until they blended in the general haze of sky and horizon.

We turned down the valley. In all that loneliness there was one comfort, the line of telegraph poles which pierced the shining depths of the valley's distance as straight as the valley itself. We followed that line, clinging to it in a vain attempt to stay in touch with civilization. We felt very much alone in the interminable vastness of that bleak valley, alone and hopeless and slightly afraid.

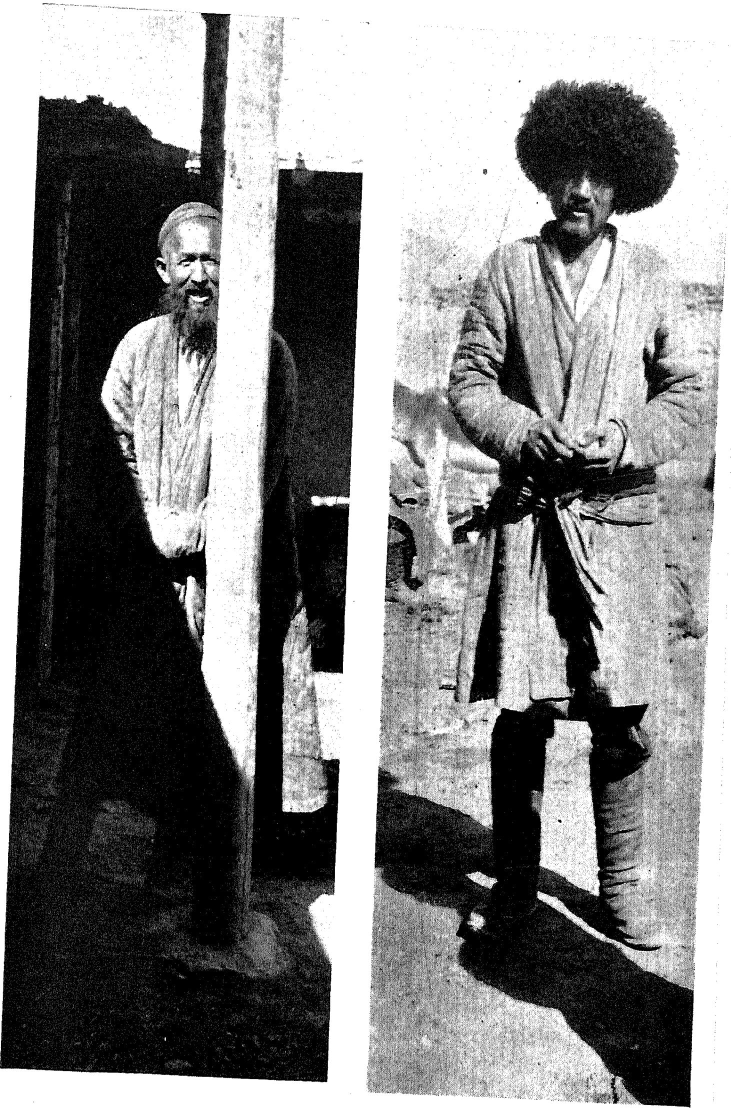
Heat! The burning sun blazed directly down. The horses plodded steadily through the sand, or splashed through the muddy shallows of the river when it chanced to wander to our road. The world was silent, immense, motionless, but for the four weary horses and the old man walking behind. A tin in the pack rattled loudly as the pack horse stumbled. The old man wheezed steadily, monotonously, maddeningly. The sand shimmered in the intense blaze.

At the valley's horizon one dim point of black appeared, grew larger, shaped itself into a stunted tree. Here at last would be shade, and food, and perhaps water. We were violently hungry, and even more thirsty. There was no place to stop in this waste. We could not drink the river's mud. We made for the tree a bit faster, hoping longingly that we could stop. On and on we went, but the tree seemed to draw away with every step. We strained ourselves, prodding the painful horses to catch it, but ever it moved in pace with us. Hours passed, long hours of longing for that tree. It seemed a bit closer now, closer and more forbidding, but still we longed, longed for rest, and shade, and water. We tried to forget it, but always it beckoned us.

We passed it high on the cliff, and the Khan did not even glance toward it. We felt lost, and utterly alone, now that the one relieving spot in the nothingness of sand had left us. But across the valley we made out a cluster of deep, cool green, and our spirits revived. The sun had begun its downward slope as we turned toward that alluring grove.

"Lengar," muttered the Khan, grinning. There were only three fallen mud huts, a low little open-front house, a few bedraggled chickens, and a dirty native or two, but nothing could have been more attractive to us at that moment. For there were green trees, real poplars, a swift stream dashing along parallel with the river, and a deep pool which fed the sluice of a little mill-house. "Sleep," said the Khan with the usual gesture, and we stretched out in the cool of the hotel porch caring for no one. The Prophet made tea, and dumped some hard round chunks of bread from a gunny-sack on to the dirt floor. Dinner was served.

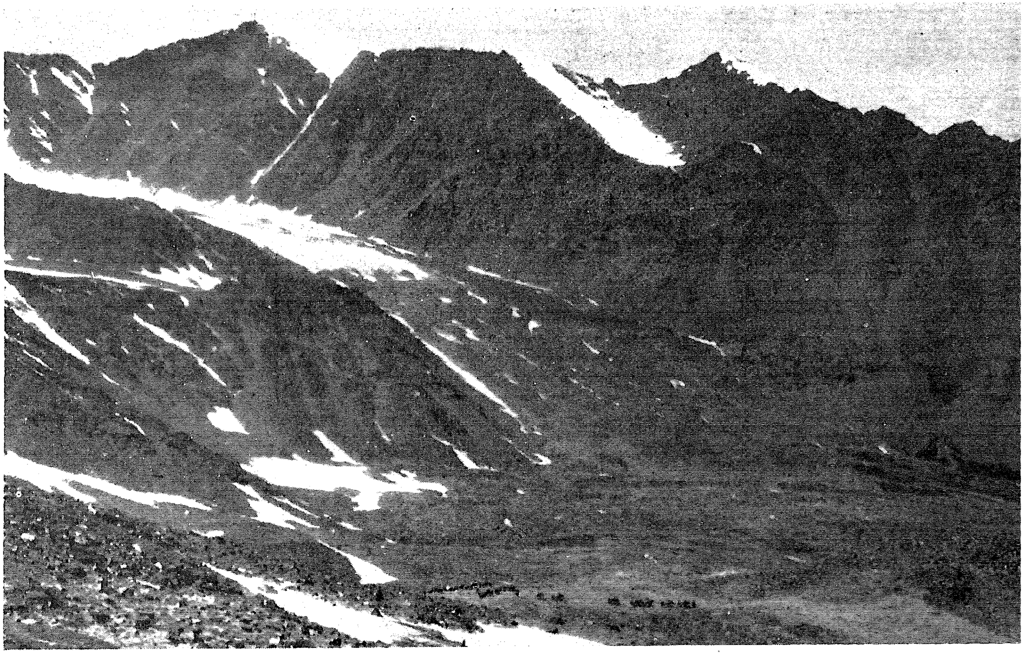
The Prophet poured tea. Then he picked up a piece of bread, wiped it on his sleeve, broke it, and blew on it long and wheezily before offering it to us. Such food soon restored our lost confidence in ourselves. At least it was



The Prophet and The Khan

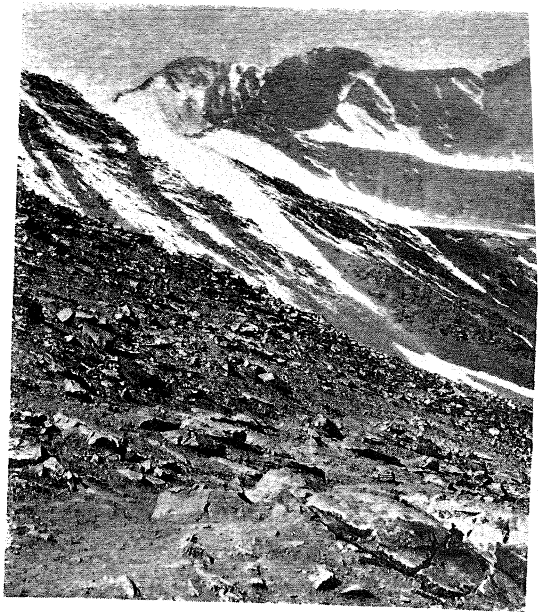
"The whole town yielded exactly five eggs." (*Page* 190)

"Nothing could have been more attractive at that moment." (*Page* 195)



"There must be few places . . . quite so terrifying."

"Climbed up the precipitous side of a gully."



"Gloomy grandeur and unbelievable vastness."

food and here were people, even if only one or two; here was security, even if dubious. We had a quiet smoke, and a yawn. "Well, shall we be moving?"

The Khan was not at all sure. He was opposed to the idea. He made a sweeping gesture to the east and said, "Nothing."

Nothing ahead? We should have to get used to nothings. Besides, it was only two o'clock. Had we left our first night's hotel only eight hours before? "Can't stop now. It's too early." After a one-sided argument, we compromised on a nap. The mud floor was very soft.

It took another argument to get the Khan going two hours later. But he finally gave in, and we mounted, turning to the left away from that vast valley up into the hills beyond. The Prophet was submissive and made no objections to the fool idea of keeping on. He probably knew what was ahead or what was not ahead, but he made no sign, and Gen only grinned resignedly.

Hours later we were climbing still, through green fields and shrub-covered hills. We saw the summit of a pass above us. The copper sun had long ago been shrouded in a thick black cloud, which had appeared as a thin wisp of vapor to grow and grow until it covered the whole sky. As we came over the top of the pass and saw a tumbled mass of hills before us, a few drops of rain fell.

The path led twisting and turning in a steep slope along the side of the deep valley set in that maze of hills. The rain fell faster. The horses plunged onward, stumbling, through the lowering dusk. The rain poured in sheets of stinging water as the horses slid down a rocky bank. We dismounted to help the animals. Darkness fell with a burst of rain. We plunged on through the night.

A huge open space loomed weirdly through the dark. Like a giant white scar on the hillside it stretched wide and far in a gentle slope, closed below by a high cliff. It was like some glacier of solid rock which had flowed from above. A light shone in a friendly flicker through the white gloom. The Gen marched on without looking and plunged into a forest of high grass.

We shivered as the wind moaned in this grass, taller than our heads. We could see nothing but the thick walls beside us, hear nothing but the friendly puffing of the horses, the moaning and rustling of the wind, and the dull patter of rain. That impenetrable wall was fearsome, would have been terrifying even in known surroundings, with the wind, the rain, and the darkness. And this was trackless Turkestan. The horses seemed to sense our uneasiness, and one of them whinnied weirdly through the dark. The Gen went onward, never pausing, unmoved by that awesome jungle.

The night was half over before we finally halted by a cluster of huts. Some dark figure took the horses, and we entered into a black hole of a room lighted by a dim lamp shaped like a small pitcher. We paused neither for food nor for tea, but spread the blankets on the floor and fell into a troubled sleep.

A dull emptiness in the abdominal regions brought us to the keen realization the next morning that we had not eaten—that is, really set our teeth in food—since George's dinner back in Osh. Tea and bread and melons make no diet for a man, especially when he is in the open.

"Well, Harry, what shall we order for breakfast? Let's see what the Khan has to offer."

It was then that we realized the shortcomings of our noble provodnik, the Gen. His Russian was even more highly imaginative than ours. We hauled out the Hindustani conversation book, and turned to the list of foods.

HARRY: Breakfast, old man. Haziree.

KHAN (*with a wide grin*) : O.K. (*or its Hindu equivalent*). (*He sets out the tea and the chunks of round hard bread, the latter a bit soggy from the rain.*)

PETE: Hey, Genghis Khan. No good. Anda yest? (Eggs are there?)

KHAN: Hindustanka, anda. Rooska, yaeets.

PETE: Damn it! We don't want to know what it is in Russian. We want to find out if there are any. Anda, yaeets yest?

KHAN: Hindustanka, anda, Rooska—

HARRY: Shut up! Listen. Anda, yaeets, eggs, œufs, eier, yest?

KHAN (*quietly and soberly*): Nyeto (There isn't any).

HARRY: Check that one off. Next?

PETE: Gen, listen. Gosht (meat) yest?

KHAN (*monotonously as if repeating a lesson*) : Hindustanka, gosht. Pa-Rooska, mm—yan'znay't (I don't know).

HARRY (*sore*) : For God's sake. Gosht yest right now, here?

KHAN: Hindustanka—(*Sees our look, sobers.*) Nyeto.

HARRY: Check that one off. Next?

Needless to say we had our tea and bread that morning and liked it. The Gen's pack contained nothing but dried bread cakes; we had some tea and a little sugar. This sumptuous fare was to last us to Kashgar. The Khan had apparently thought that we would buy all the food, and we, trusting in Sovtorgflots, had thought the Khan was the steward. The prospect was slightly unpleasant. "We might be able to buy something to eat along the way," said Pete optimistically. It was this idea which gave us new courage. And anyway, we could not return to Russia; we had a one-way ticket out of the country with no permission to return. We mounted, and continued, leaving a crowd of staring natives looking at their empty hands.

Hot sunlight alternated with drizzling rain all that morning, as we toiled up a long green valley. The thick grass and heavy shrubbery were brilliant in the sun, glistening with water, dull and tropical-looking in the frequent rain. Wide fields were covered with the speckled white of wild hollyhocks, hillsides showed patches of rose-bushes, the dull purple of wild lavender, clumps of bluish bachelor's buttons, and whole masses of scabious. Here in Asia were growing wild the familiar flowers of gardens at home. We collected armfuls of the fragrant blossoms and covered ourselves with them, just for sentiment's sake. Genghis Khan looked on amused, and the Prophet scowled.

The pass was topped, a pass leading to another river wider than the former. The lofty white peaks of the Tien Shan soared in an unbroken rim into the sky, blotted here and there by the low-lying clouds. Under them hills rose in jagged spots from the valley of the wide and distant river. The river banks were clustered with trees, which almost hid the dim silver streak of the water. We slid down the steep path to the river.

"The Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition crossing a perilous ford," said Pete, as the horses splashed into the muddy water up to their bellies. The water was shallow, and swirled swiftly among numerous islands. As we passed across a strip of land, three huge eagles rose from a fallen tree and flapped noisily away. We crossed the rest of the river, and discovered a little town, hidden in the thick groves.

"Name, please, Gen?"

"Gulcha," muttered the Khan, spitting.

"I'll bet this river is the Kizil-Zu," said Pete. "Hey, Gen, name of river?"

"Gulcha," muttered the Khan, spitting again.

"Whatever it is, we'll have some food," Harry said eagerly. We pulled up to a tumble-down tea-house or chaikhana and stabled the horses in the yard. "Now for some dinner."

"Listen, Genghis Khan. Shorba (soup) yest?"

"Hindustanka, shorba, Roos—" We almost shot him. The same process again.

"They can't kid me," said Pete, defiant with hunger. "I see a chicken, and where there are chickens, there are eggs. Let's go out and buy some ourselves."

The whole town yielded exactly five eggs. It was a poor substitute for real food, but it would have to do. We opened them into a pan. Three of them were bad!

"Tea and bread, or perhaps bread and tea. I'm fed up, I mean I'm not fed up. We can't go on with this. We'll be sick. I'm weak already."

"Yes," said Harry. "But Kashgar is only ten days away if we hurry. Remember that Ellsworth Huntington told us to eat what the natives eat. I wish I could find out what they eat, besides bread and tea. They look very healthy."

We pulled our belts tighter, and slept to forget that while our bellies were full, there was no nourishment in the tea and bread diet. But we could not turn back now. We should die of hunger. We started out again in beautiful afternoon sunlight to follow the river upward toward the snows.

The road ran down along the river-bed, then high up on the cliffs, winding about gullies and canyons, crossing dry streams and rock slides. Long caravans of camels passed, swaying slowly in rhythm to the clank of cow bells, plodding forward under immense loads of cotton, or silk, or rough uncombed wool, their drivers shouting from behind or trudging stolidly onward in front. Sometimes droves of little gray donkeys trotted by, waving their long ears, jogging along easily under heavy loads of scrap iron, or struggling persistently beneath fat old men. A native on a racing camel caught up with us, chasing a baby camel. With our combined aid he caught the recalcitrant infant, and for a while the Expedition acquired a new member as Pete held the tugging, whinnying thing in order that its owner might talk to the Khan.

The sun set in a glorious blaze, and a full orange moon rose between the mountains, but we kept on. The trees were still with the quiet of warm night, the sandy hills cast strange shadows in the reddish sweep of light. How friendly the moon looked in these wild places!

A hollow square of flat-roofed mud houses appeared in the yellow moonlight, and the Gen turned aside for the night. We sat down on a floor by a fireplace, and watched the natives getting supper.

A chubby-faced Mongolian girl filled a wooden bowl with a thick white gruel, and passed it around. We were fifth in line, but we didn't care, for here at last was something nourishing. We forgot to wipe off the rim of this loving-cup in our eagerness to drink. It tasted like a mixture of cheese and dough. "Must be an Uzbek Welsh rabbit," glooped Pete through it. The bowl was soon emptied, and refilled with mare's milk as a side dish. With a little tea and bread to remind us that we were in Asia we enjoyed a hearty meal, and lay back, bloated, to listen to the funny stories of the old men.

The population of Turkestan seems to be made up entirely of old men and children. The former love to talk, the latter to sit. The Prophet started off the conversation with a long wheezy tale. "Bjjjzzzz-buddamandumbar—bjjzzzzz-yok-chuk-yakshi-chuckatupt—bjjzzzzzz-buddaman-daydaw." The Khan interrupted, "Bjjzzzz-yak-shuck-tuk?"

"Bjjzzzz-tong-puttaput," said one of the old men, complacently.

The Prophet went on with his story. "Bjjzzzz-plinkety-plank-plonk-buddaman-daydaw." We interrupted this time to sweep aside a few of the squatters for our blankets. The fat girl grinned and brought us a pillow, and we went quietly to bed.

"Bjjzzzz—"

"Put an egg in that malted," murmured Pete. Harry sat up. It was cold, the clear cold of morning, with a wintry sun promising the heat of the day to come. Pete opened his eyes and saw the same group of old men buzzing away. "I thought it was a malted-milk machine, all that bjjzzzing. What a language! They seem to have to get a good start before they can talk."

"Like cranking an engine," Harry muttered.

The Khan always took a long time starting. He enjoyed a good conversation, and never made an attempt to be moving until we had eaten, smoked, and sat around for a while. We were anxious to get to Kashgar and food, and that morning we ate our frugal bread and tea in a hurry. But Gen had to have his chat. We pulled him away, and made him load the horses. We rode out of the courtyard without a backward look. "Bjjzzzzz-bang!" yelled the Khan at the crowd. He got his parting shot. They dispersed quickly.

We felt very badly all that day. The baby diet was beginning to tell. We were weak and feverish, and were troubled with diarrhœa. But we could not seem to make the Khan understand that we were sick. It was hardly nice of him to starve us as well as get us such awful horses.

The animal which the Prophet claimed to own was no rearing thoroughbred. We had noticed the backs of all the animals that morning. They had sores ranging from a few inches to a couple of square feet under the saddles. We called Gen's attention to their condition. He sighed resignedly, and then grinned as he put a little straw over the red, raw wounds. Perhaps it was these galls which made the Prophet's horse give up. At any rate he picked a very unfortunate place to run away.

The narrow trail ran curving on the edge of a shelving cliff, with a rocky drop of a hundred feet to the river. We were riding along thinking of nothing, when there was a clattering of tin pans behind us, and like a thunderbolt this animal dashed by between us and the cliff. As he reached Pete the heavy protruding duffel bag swung by, catching Pete in the side. Harry took a blow on the shoulder and was thrown from his horse. The maddened beast dashed on in a clatter of pans to slip, stumble, and roll in a struggling heap over the cliff to the very edge of the swift water below.

The Khan looked around with a huge grin on his handsome face and watched Harry trying not to follow the pack horse to the river, and Harry's horse dashing up the road in the opposite direction. He laughed as Pete dragged his own steed by sheer force up over the edge of the precipice. When the fuss had subsided the Khan was seen fishing in the river for Harry's rifle, and tying the remaining baggage to the foaming horse which was still by some miracle alive. These little things fazed Genghis Khan not one bit.

"Loshat kuchat," said the Khan, meaning that the horses were hungry. We stopped to let them graze.

"But how about us?" Gen didn't understand. We decided to try the same trick. We proceeded on to an island in the middle of the river where a fine old tree offered solitary shade.

"We kuchat, Genghis Khan." It was a new custom in that country, getting your own lunch. Gen was finally persuaded, and we ate some tea and bread. The bread by now was so hard that it could be broken only by soaking it in tea and banging it on the stones.

Gen felt conversational after lunch as usual. The Prophet was mooning away on the side, so we were the victims. He asked us our age. "Twenty-two."

"Wife?" demanded the Khan with appropriate gestures.

Harry smiled. "No, not yet."

The Khan gave us a look of commiserating scorn. Then he pointed to himself and held up four fingers. Four wives! The old devil! We asked his age, not to be outdone. "Twenty-four." And the Prophet? "Thirty-five." The Khan looked at least thirty-five, and as for the Prophet, that old graybeard with the bad asthma and the wrinkled face seemed at least sixty. We were thankful then for the softening influences of modern civilization.

We pressed on, hoping against hope that the evening would bring food of some sort. This Central Asiatic hooey at that point was all bunk. There came a moment of encouragement when a red Soviet flag was seen on the top of the hill. "Sapper-Kurgan," explained the Khan. "Rooski." Perhaps they would have some food. A mud fort hove in sight, with grass growing on its flat roof. We were not really in the wilderness, but under the protection of the long arm of the Reds. We should have been disappointed that there was now no chance of bandits, had it not been for the promise of dinner.

An officious-looking soldier dashed out. "Documents, please." We followed him into the fort like two hungry dogs, to meet a group of staring men all smoking. They examined our papers and looked worried. "Transit visa," they told us. "Too long in Russia."

"Oh, ah, no," we said, producing Gorby's letter. It had a magic effect. They shook hands and smiled. "And now we hungry. No food four days." We rubbed our stomachs. They smiled nicely, but forgot to understand. We were shoved out to continue our hungry way.

"I'm going to get food to-night if I have to eat Prophet steak," said Pete, as we pulled up at last in a dirty little kibitka, or hotel. "Ha! I see a chicken. If I see a chicken, there must be a chicken there, and chickens are good to eat. Call the manager."

The filthy native was unwilling to part with his prizes. The Khan wouldn't help. We tried to enlist his aid by explaining the gravity of the situation. "Quick, Harry, look up the word for 'chicken.' And the word for 'sick.' Get out the old Hindustanka, and if the Khan tries to Hindustanka us, I'm going to be the first to shoot him."

"Now, Mr. Ashura Akhoon, you will please listen. We are sick. Bemaree! Very damned bemaree! We have to have food. Tea no good, bread no good. Have to have chicken. Coocool, hear, coocool. You're a cad and a fellow if you don't buy us a coocool. Bemaree, coocool, understand?"

The Khan drew himself up to his full height. "Hindustan—"

"Hey! Coocool! Damn it! Coocool! Go!"

The Khan saw he could not fool us, for we had seen chickens. He brought back a rooster and a hen, skinned them after trying in vain to pluck the bodies, and put them in the shallow iron pot, into which everything goes in Turkestan. They boiled for an hour, while we rubbed our stomachs.

"Now for food, real, hairy food. We'll drink the broth first, as an appetizer, and then tackle the carcasses." The broth, with hated bread soaked in it, was fine. Pete pulled out a body and licked it before biting.

"Um-mmm! Ouch! Blankety-blank! It's tough as nails!" Failure again stared us in the face. No chicken could we eat that night. We broke a knife and gave it up reluctantly. We went to bed more reluctantly, to watch the Uzbek tribe of the district called in for the wake. They finished the bodies somehow, and trooped out with meat inside of them.

"Zaftra," said the Khan, meaning to-morrow, "Terek!"

"What's Terek?" Harry wanted to know.

"Terek," explained Pete, sickly and sleepily, "is the pass we have to cross. It is thirteen thousand feet high, and covered with eternal snows." Thirteen thousand feet! We were at an altitude of seven thousand then. Could we climb six thousand feet of rare atmosphere in our present condition? Could those damned skinny horses do it? Could anybody do it? We dreamed of bones bleaching among the snows, our bones. Thirteen thousand feet! As high as some of America's largest peaks! And only a pass!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BEHIND THE RANGES

> "Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—
> Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!"
>
> *Rudyard Kipling*

THE Terek Pass is the shortest and by far the hardest road from Russian Turkestan to Kashgar. Horses can cross it only with difficulty. Their bones lying scattered along the route mutely testify to the dangers of the way. Alert little donkeys puff and scramble up its precipitous sides; men trained in the mountains take frequent rests as they toil breathlessly upward. It is impossible for camels, which go by the longer and easier way through the beautiful Alai Valley to the southward. Rarely is the weather clear among those black, snow-covered peaks; the sun shines through the thick clouds infrequently, to loosen the hard-packed glaciers and send them roaring down into the valley in an irresistible avalanche of stones, ice, and snow, leaving a livid scar on the mountain side.

For some reason later to be understood the Khan was on his toes that morning, and we got a very early start. Early as it was, the inhabitants of the hotel had already departed to work, strengthened no doubt by their chicken dinner of the previous night. We started upward, ever upward, past wheat fields at nine thousand feet, piercing a narrow, rock-bound gorge where a little stream rushed freshly and madly on its way to the desert-bound Oxus. The trail wound over and around that stream; we followed it up, seeking its source among the glaciers and snow-fields of the pass of Terek.

There was a number of yurts scattered along the way —round, hemispherical structures of felt and skins, with a square little doorway in front and a smoke hole above. The doorway had a flap of felt which could be rolled up like a curtain and fastened to the top. Children dressed in gaudy reds and greens tended sheep near by, or stood with folded hands watching us as we passed. Old women in long cloaks decorated with silver flashed white teeth at us in answer to our nod. Yaks, black, shaggy, horned animals with thick black and white tails stood near the yurts, munching grass or tugging at their restraining ropes. Goats trotted about among the sheep, to be chased away by the shouting children. It was a delightful pastoral scene in the morning sunlight, there beneath the high green hills in the little valley by that rushing brook, a scene familiar and yet exotic, well-known to our imaginations but alien to our eyes. We passed it and left staring women and children in our wake.

Now the bed of the stream swung directly upward, the road grew rocky and steep, the horses stumbled and slipped on the sharp stones. The valley narrowed to a sharp defile through which the stream rushed in tiny waterfalls. A cold wind whistled in the hot sunlight. We caught glimpses of immense snowy peaks ahead of us, which seemed to reach into the heart of the heavens. The horses' feet before us were on a level with our eyes; behind us we could look down directly upon their backs.

The sun flashed blindingly from the distant snow; the steep sides of the defile led upward, ever upward, in slight curves toward those snows. The Khan rode before, silently, grimly; behind the Prophet wheezed and coughed and struggled for breath as the air grew rarer.

We crossed and recrossed the torrential stream, each crossing necessitating a careful control of horses on the slippery rocks. Water splashed icily against our legs. We came to a little glacier in a gully on the hillside, over which the narrow path led. The Khan dismounted, walked ahead, and tested his weight upon it carefully. It shuddered slightly, and a large piece of ice cracked off the end with a hollow thud, sliding into the water. We avoided it and crossed the stream, wading along its rough edge past the glacier.

The distant mountains came closer and higher as we climbed up the precipitous side of the gully to avoid a narrow chasm of rock. On the top could be seen hills, nothing but hills in disorder to the westward, and snowy peaks in a huge bowl to the east. The sun was masked by a cloud and we saw it no more that day.

"Every day," panted Pete, "it rains on that pass at exactly three o'clock. It's now noon. We have less than three hours to make it."

Down again into the narrow valley we went, slipping jerkily along the dirt patch. Once more we met the stream, now smaller and more swift. We followed it upward until the valley widened into a great expanse of hill, rimmed by the snow and the black peaks. We climbed up a gentle slope to the top of this hill and stood in the very center of a vast amphitheater of mountains.

A few drops of rain fell from the lowering sky, whipped by the icy wind into our faces. Gloom was in the air as we saw what lay before us, gloom was in our hearts as we thought of attempting that immensity with empty stomachs. Gloom was in the surroundings themselves, black, comfortless despair.

There must be few places on this earth quite so awful, so terrifying, as that huge cup of mountains. It was black, sheer, solid, cheerless black, shot with brilliant white spots of snow-fields. The sky-line far above was sharp and even, rimming the bowl of valley below with three solid sides; the fourth was the gulch up which we had struggled, dammed two thousand feet below by one gigantic peak which reached nearly to the level of the black mountains before us.

Down from that sharp-cut, even sky-line the steeps of the mountains plunged precipitously, white snow and black rock, into a hollow huge as the valley itself, filled with snow. The green hill upon which we stood sloped down gently to this bottom of the bowl, and then shot perpendicularly upward through the snow and the black rock.

It was the complete lack of color which impressed us most, after the gloomy grandeur and the unbelievable vastness of the place. Nothing relieved the sheer black and white but the depressing gray of the clouds overhead, which threatened the tops of the peaks and softened their jagged roughness. We looked down at our feet, and our eyes were gladdened by the green of the grass, and the purple of clusters of strange little flowers which grew there under the shadow of immensity itself. How comforting they were, those dots of purple, and yet how utterly insignificant beside the vast work of a greater Nature! The Khan pressed on beyond the grass, and we found ourselves alone with the snow, the black rocks, and the razor-edged breadth of the great ranges.

We turned to the left, forsaking the insurmountable wall ahead for a sharp ridge showing clean-cut against the sky. The wind like an icy blast of Hell swirled stinging rain through our thin clothes. The snow, snow which never melts, crunched underfoot. The trail began to wind back and forth upon itself, leading by slow stages up what seemed the very face of the cliff. Where the stones had been worn bare of snow by the eternal winds, they lay jagged, sharp-edged, piled in rough heaps of black. The Khan struggled on above us, resting every few feet, lashing the whistling horses onward and upward to scramble madly for a moment, and then to pause, heaving. Far below us the Prophet could be heard wheezing regularly above the roar of the wind.

With a sudden burst of white the wind swept a fury of driven snow in our numbed faces, blotting out everything but the dim razor-edge of the pass above us. We lowered our heads, and the horses stumbled on for a few feet more.

Harry chanced to look around and down, to shield his face from those biting lashes of hard snow. The Prophet could be seen far below lying in a small black splotch against a snow-bank, a tiny spot of dark showing dimly in the cloudy streaks of white. Harry shouted at the top of his bursting lungs to the Khan, pointing violently. Genghis hurried off, slipping and slithering down the steep side to the Prophet. He shook him violently and prodded him along until he was able to wheeze up to us. Down there the two small figures seemed scarcely human, so immense was Nature and so small was man. After that the Khan gave the old man a mouthful of their indispensable naas and stayed near him.

All about us, beside the trail and on it, were scattered white bleached bones of animals; whole skeletons lay where they had fallen, remains of horses with shreds of hide still shriveled on them, single skulls and bones mingled with the sharp rocks showing gaunt and white against the black. We struggled on further. A human skull grinned at us from a round rock just above. We shivered, and bent our heads.

Once more! One more fight against that wind, one more heartbreaking scramble, one more slipping, stumbling struggle in the teeth of the whiplike snow and we would be at the top! The horses' sides swelled almost to bursting as they gasped for air; foam streaked their sweaty necks, freezing into matted hair as it flew from their gaping mouths. Their knees shook as they fought for breath, the breath which rasped noisily in their throats. A lunge, a few feet gained, a foot lost in a slip, and our heads were level with the summit. We fell off the horses and crawled over the edge.

In a sudden avalanche the wind burst upon us with the full fury of its power. Ten times as strong it hurled us back to gasp against a protecting rock. Snow lashed us like bullets, stinging numbly in our faces. All the awe, all the fearsome promise, all the terror in those vast peaks behind us poured forth in the terrible violent wrath of the gale. Biting fiercely, it howled with the frenzy of God-driven force.

The Khan dragged the horses over the top, and we drove ourselves downward into a valley even more awe-inspiring and sullen than that other from which we had escaped. We descended rapidly, piercing forcibly the hard blanket of wind which threatened to throw us back up the hill. A fresh rush of sleety snow hurled itself upon us; we buried our heads in our arms. Bones, more bones, peeped from among the black rocks everywhere. We passed the rattling carcass of a camel. Crunch! A horse stepped on a donkey's skull, stumbled violently.

"God!" cried Harry. "I thought we had conquered old Terek, but this is worse than the other side." We slithered through the wind down and down, yearning for the respite of a moment's quiet.

"If this doesn't stop," Pete shouted above the roar, "it looks like we'll join the gang lying around here on the ground pretty soon." He raised his voice and sang loudly, "For when I die, don't bury me at—" The wind whipped away the rest of it.

"God!" yelled Harry again. "We've got to get out of old Terek's shadow soon. I've got about ten minutes more in me."

On we slid, downward over the sharp black rocks. The Prophet was far behind and the Khan had stopped nonchalantly behind a rock to light Harry's pipe, as his drugs had given out. The snow turned to a driving rain, but as we went lower and lower, the wind died to a stiff breeze, which blew icily up the wide valley. It began to get dark, a gloomy darkness of storm.

We passed by a high waterfall in the beautiful rocky valley, reached the last of the black rock, and entered the green of grass once more. The rain drove through us, freezing solid on our clothes. We forded the river, and climbed high on the opposite hillside, feeling totally lost from the world.

A noise was heard. "Aw-ee-aw-ee-aaaw!" The wind hurled the sound to us. A jackass! How we had once cursed that sound in early-morning slumber! But how we welcomed it now! A yurt, four yurts, sprang to view around the bend.

We threw ourselves off our horses, and pulled up the flap of one of the structures, peering in through the smoke. Six fat faces grinned back at us. A man got up and motioned us in. We entered and sank to the floor. An old woman poured us a bowl of tea.

"Oh blessed tea," said Pete, his spirits rising. "We've had nothing but you for five days, but you certainly come in handy at times like this." Warm and drowsy and safe once more, we toasted our bare feet by the fire, while the Kirghiz family looked on in wonderment.

The Khan arrived with the Prophet, and saw us stretched out on the soft rugs of the yurt. "Sahib," he said. "Paidoot." Evidently he was opposed to a halt at this point. Harry reached for his knife, and Pete snatched up a pot of boiling water. The Khan beat a hasty retreat, grinning.

"If that son of a female hound thinks we're going to move a night like this," said Pete, "he can go fry his little Mary."

"You're right," Harry answered, turning his bare heel to catch the full heat of the blaze. "But food seems to be the most important thing at this point. You can't cross Tereks without a chaser."

Pete had an idea. "I saw sheep, live sheep, outside. Where sheep are is meat. You can't fool me. I *know* that sheep are food. Let's eat."

The straggly-bearded Kirghiz who seemed to be the boss of the establishment was loath to part with any of his prizes. It took considerable rubles to persuade him. But after the bargain had been settled, the deed was swift and dark. "Nozhik," demanded the man, and Pete handed over his knife. Outside in the rain there was a blood-curdling baa-a, ending suddenly and sharply in a bubbling grunt. A steaming carcass was dragged in, the Khan acting as pallbearer. In no time at all the pot was bubbling contentedly.

The interior of that yurt made a cozy scene in the flickering firelight. Soft shadows danced upon the round, rug-draped walls, lighting up with weird lines the fierce yellow faces which watched the black pot so intently. The whole space was perhaps ten feet in diameter, circular, and seven feet high, its hemispherical walls broken directly overhead by a jagged round smoke hole. As the rain splashed and sizzled into the pot from this hole, a man got up and hoisted an ingenious flap over it, holding the triangular piece of felt in place with a forked stick secured by a braided rope of horse-hair, so that the smoke could get out while the rain could not enter.

The walls were covered with brilliant rugs and hangings, of red and gold and yellow, which reached almost to the bare grass below. Above these hangings, and in places where they did not meet, could be made out the structure of the framework, a lattice arrangement of thin wood which folds up in sections like a pantograph when the yurt is taken down. Beneath the lattice the brown-gray inside of the heavy felt covering was grimy with the smoke of ages.

One side of the interior, curtained off by a rich red drapery, was evidently the pantry, boudoir, and store-closet. The women retired in there to change clothes, look for dishes, or pack away the rugs which were not being used. The floor was strewn with thick felt matting next to the walls, with heavy embroidered rugs of colored wool, and with tanned sheepskins, resting directly on the hard-pressed grass. In the center of this circle of mats was the fire, made of fine chips from gnarled, weather-cracked branches of hard wood and chunks of dried yak-dung. Over the smoky blaze an iron tripod held a flat, blackened iron bowl about two feet in diameter, in which everything was inevitably cooked. Under the pot in the hot coals a blackened copper tea-kettle, shaped like a tall fat water-pitcher, steamed and sizzled, boiling the last bit of tea from the tiny heap of tea-leaves which had been put in it, and no doubt boiling also the grounds of the previous week.

As the fire died down, one of the men arose and hacked expertly at a small stump with a little adze, throwing the handful of chips on the coals, delicately placing a large piece of dung on top, and blowing with long wheezes. The Prophet appeared at this moment, and added his hoarse rasp to stimulating the fire, whistling and sucking through his asthma. The pot began to boil once more.

An old woman sat tailor-fashion on one side of the circle, cleaning the intestines of our sheep and throwing the refuse on the grass beside her. She held her head proudly under the white, silver-ornamented head-dress of a Kirghiz wife, as she took one end of the gut in her teeth and ran her fingers together down the knotted length of it. Beside her a naked little boy, yellow and round-faced, played with the entrails quietly. Two little girls, red and puffing from the cold, squeezed through the flap of the door, pulled off tiny, knee-length leather boots, placed them in a row on the top of a pile of gaudy red and yellow chests, and warmed their bare toes at the fire. Their mother said something to them out of the corner of her mouth as she squeezed the intestines, and they pattered over to place the boots behind the hangings in the boudoir.

The Khan turned up the flap and entered stooping. He sprawled down on the grass and sniffed the thickly bubbling pot. Men kept coming and going, men clothed in long flannel coats and peaked white hats, with big knives stuck in their tall boots. They were all bearded, but their beards were scanty, a soft yellow tuft at the chin, tangled sideburns, and drooping dark mustaches. They looked mournfully impassive as they stalked about in their thick clothes, their thumbs stuck in the brilliant blue or orange handkerchief which was tied around their waists. Some of them had no sideburns, but two long points of beard which waggled furiously when they talked, just as the Prophet's waggled.

"Sahib!" said the Khan, holding out to us a carved and colored wooden bowl filled with mutton stew. We attacked it savagely. A young girl with a shawl tied about her head went out of the door, came back with the hind end of a goat, which she pulled inside and began to milk into a bowl. The old woman filled up our cups with tea and begged the huge lumps of sugar which we produced for it. The girl passed around the bowl of warm goat's milk, after pouring part of it in the tea-pot; then she filled another bowl with thick kumys from a skin hanging on the wall near the pantry and passed that around to the assembled diners. The naked little boy stood up and made water into the fire. The old woman settled down to nursing a half-clothed baby in the corner.

"Look at that baby!" exclaimed Harry, excitedly. "See the blue vein on his groin? I read somewhere that only Mongolian children under a certain age have that blue line on the groin. It disappears later. The Eskimos have it, as well as every child with a drop of Mongolian blood. It's a sure sign of the Mongol somewhere in that baby's ancestry."

"That's funny," answered Pete, leaving the bowl of stew for a moment. "We'd better report that to Bert Keller up at college when we get back. It might be a useful scientific fact." Pete flung himself at the mutton once more.

How good it tasted! No matter if it was tough, and uncooked; how unimportant that the bowl had never been washed. We helped it down with goat's milk, and tea, and the bitter, heady kumys. It was food, real, hairy, chewable food. We scorned the bread which the Prophet blew upon and offered us, and filled in with the fresh meat.

As our stomachs were rather shriveled after the long, hungry ordeal of the last few days, we hardly did justice to the meal. However, the four Kirghiz men, the Prophet and the Khan, the two women, and the troop of children soon finished off that whole sheep, and licked their greasy fingers, leaving nothing but a pile of bare bones which were thrown to the shrinking dogs outside. Not one scrap was wasted; the Kirghiz took everything. We wanted the large chunk of flabby fat which is on the tail of these sheep, but that, the most useful part of the animal, of course went to our hosts. The Khan got the skin, and we asked him to make us a hat like his own out of it; but he only muttered, "No good." He put it carefully away in his baggage, and no doubt he is wearing a new spring bonnet at this moment.

The fire died down, and the yurt grew clearer from smoke. The men squatted about on the grass, chewing the rag violently, "Bjzzzz-buddaman-daydaw." The two women retired to one side, and coiled up the sheep's innards into one of the wooden bowls. We felt sleepy after the long day, and we signified our intentions for bed by a wide yawn. One of the men understood that universal signal, and spread out two huge rugs on the ground. The two little girls, the young lady, the boy, and the baby crawled in. The head of the family untied the handkerchief from his waist and motioned us to follow. Evidently we were to sleep with the whole family. We shook our heads, and spread out our own blankets, taking off trousers and sweaters, before climbing in. They all gasped in horror, and gave us annoyed looks. Their consternation was due partly to our rudeness in wishing to sleep by ourselves, and partly to our using blankets enough for ten people and taking up so much room. When we undressed there was a roar of laughter; even the baby joined in. What queer customs these American Sahibs had, sleeping by themselves, and taking off their clothes! Who ever heard of undressing for bed? That was the time to dress more warmly!

During the night the family annexed the room we had used for sleeping by piling on top of our blankets. The Prophet was curled up in his overcoat near the door, the Khan was leaning a sharp elbow on Pete's chest. Harry lay between Pete and the family, and spent his time pushing away nervous children, rolling men, and grunting women.. He fell into a fitful slumber from which he was awakened with a start. He shook Pete. "Listen!"

The sound came again, a hoarse, rasping cough. It was repeated and echoed several times. "Something's got indigestion," whispered Pete, as he reached over the sleeping form of the Prophet to lift up the flap of the door. We looked out. The night was clear and cold, starry and beautiful. The sound came again, hollow and awe-inspiring. We peered through the darkness, and began to laugh with the sudden relaxation from excitement. A herd of yaks were grazing about the yurt, giving vent to gargantuan belches with savage gusto.

These yaks are fearsome beasts, especially the bulls. We were called upon to officiate at a yak-bull taming contest the next morning. A loud noise of scrambling and shouting awoke us at five-thirty. We emerged from the yurt, blinking. Straight above, a clear blue sky was framed by steep brown hills covered with dew, still in the shadow of the mountains except for a line of brilliant sunlight on the tip of the slope to the west. The four yurts sat squat in the hollow on the hillside, looking upon a sparkling stream flaming icily down the valley from Terek. The old pass was hidden by the steepness of the valley, but we could see his surrounding snows shining in the unseen sun. The little hollow was bustling with Kirghiz. Two old men had hobbled a square-shouldered, white bull yak, and were attempting to throw him. A woman looked on and laughed, flashing white teeth and shaking her black braided hair and silver earrings, one hand resting on her red blouse. A little girl in long braids tied with silver ribbon was chasing a yak calf, which leaped and kicked like an awkward puppy about the yurts. The Khan was entertaining a circle of ladies, laughing as he scratched his close-shaven head. The head wife of the household milked a goat into the tea-pot for our breakfast, and put a few hairs in also for seasoning. The old men were dragged back and forth over the grass by the maddened bull, who had no scruples about charging at the two white Sahibs.

We left before they had tamed the animal, swerving aside as he came at us. As we passed over a ridge he was on his back; the men were trying to get a ring in his nose as he kicked violently and indiscriminately at Kirghiz, who jumped nimbly away from the flying hoofs.

Financially our first Kirghiz adventure had been unsuccessful. We had paid dearly for a sheep which the family had eaten. We had given a cheap pair of scissors to the wife, who began at once to clip the hair of her youngest offspring, grinning delightedly. We had used up a flashlight battery owing to their insistent clamor for the "electrique" which they could not do without after seeing it. Of course there was the goat's milk and the kumys on the credit side. We resolved to be more careful in the future, where these Kirghiz were concerned.

They are rich, these Kirghiz, often fabulously rich for those parts and for Soviet Russia, owing to their inheritance customs, their simple mode of life, and their inability to spend money once they have it. Year in, year out, they tend their flocks, moving with the season and the grass, using one district until no food is left for the sheep, goats, and yaks, then taking down their yurts, packing them on beautiful mountain horses, and proceeding on to new pastures. Twice a year the men drive the flocks to the towns to be shorn or butchered, returning with money and new dresses for the women, and silver ornaments for decorations. All their worldly belongings go with them when they move, house, cattle, bank. They have few wants which they cannot themselves supply. The Soviets never bother them, for they cannot be found in the maze of hills, and besides, the Soviets know what marauding they can do when they are aroused. They are healthy, unlearned savages, putting their children to work as soon as they can walk. It's a common sight to see two brightly clothed little girls trotting madly about the hillsides in eager chase of twenty or thirty sheep.

We saw many yurts from then on. In the summer season the Kirghiz go high in the mountains in search of the fresh, summer grass, often staying for months above twelve thousand feet. In the cold winters they seek the warmest valleys, and cluster about the little hamlets when the snow is too deep for their flocks. But now they scattered themselves over the green hills, spreading out the sheep and goats through the surrounding valleys.

It was a beautiful day. The sun sparkled on the stream, and the coolness of the morning was slowly dispersed by its burning rays. Gen rode in front, singing at the top of his lungs, shouting a song we had heard him hum before. It started on a low note and rose two octaves, continuing in a shrieking, rollicking rhythm, and ending in a long drawn-out screech which was cut off suddenly with a jerk. We suspected that it was dirty, from the evil grin of the Khan as he sang it. The words sounded somewhat as follows:

Keling, yaling, kullawalee,
Hursam, balip, annawalee,
Lola, jullabai, lola, jullabai-la-a-a-a-a-ay-up!

The Prophet wheezed on behind, holding to the tail of the pack horse, or running up to the Khan to borrow some naas, the green snuff which neither seemed to be able to do without.

We forded the stream again and again and then suddenly left it, ascending a long winding valley. We overtook a large horse caravan, traveling to the border empty, and helped the shouting drivers push the lazy skinny animals up the hill. "Oh, my Lord," muttered Pete. "Do we have to go up and over again?" He asked the Khan.

"Three more Tereks," said that official with a leer.

The top of the pass was reached, and we rested for a moment to catch the view. An immense valley stretched out before us, with a wide river running through it. High jagged crags rimmed its brown bowl; on the right in the far distance we could see a range of mountains such as we had never dreamed of, dazzling-white in the sun. Down the long valley we went, crossing the river where it ran between rocky cliffs. The water was a clear sapphire on the yellow gravel as it flowed smoothly in the rocky canyon. We wound along and entered another valley on the left. There, behind us, seeming but a short walk away, was the pass we had just crossed. It hardly seemed possible that it had taken us over three hours to come from there.

The horse caravan was left behind, and we pressed up another precipitous trail toward a bare, wind-swept hollow in the sky-line. The horses struggled back and forth, going yards to make a foot upward, resting every moment in the rarefied atmosphere, for this pass was at an altitude of twelve thousand feet. We pulled to the top and rested.

The distance was snow, white, glaring snow with jagged, deep-cut shadows. The valley opened in gentle, rolling slopes to frame this mass of white. A long ridge closed its mouth and set itself up black against the sharp-pointed tumble of brilliance, cutting off the base. At no place in that distant range was the whiteness broken by bare rock.

"Pamirs!" said the Khan, with a sweep of his arm. "Tien Shan!"

Those were the famous Pamirs, the high valleys discovered by the Polos, where the sheep reported by them may be found. High peaks of twenty-two thousand feet or more, valleys seven thousand feet deep, all covered by the eternal snows. We longed to pierce that unbroken wall of sheer white, which gleamed against the blue sky so much whiter than the clouds above it. We knew that this range of Tien Shan, of which the Pamirs is a part, extended south into the Karakorum and Kashmir, to the east as far as Mongolia, forming an almost impenetrable barrier between Russia and Chinese Turkestan.

The Khan pulled us to one side and pointed to two peaks which topped the rest in vast towering heaps of solidarity. "Kungur," he said, pointing to the left one. And the right "Muz Tagh Ata." Muz Tagh Ata, old Father of Snows, raised his head proudly at a height of 24,386 feet, but Kungur, the lofty, tops even his hoary summit at 25,200. The Khan may have been fooling us, but at that moment we were ready to believe anything.

We turned and looked back. The valley behind opened as before, but framed a disordered pile of jumbled peaks and the flat, queerly cracked sides of the nearest mountain. Directly below, three figures were climbing. As they drew closer we saw that they were horsemen, and soldiers. They arrived and saluted.

Stalwart, husky fellows they were in their peaked caps with the red Soviet star. They sat straight on their champing horses like three apostles of Communism in the wilderness. The fiery horses faced the wind, nostrils distended, manes standing up, looking out at the barrier of mountains in the distance. The soldiers grinned as we took their pictures, and gave us their addresses for copies. And then, with a gentle touch of the spurs the powerful animals forced their way down the steep slope, leaving us to follow slowly and stumblingly.

We passed down the valley and came upon a single yurt. A woman ran up to us, gesticulating, pointing to the squat structure. We dismounted, and pushed aside the flap out of curiosity.

"Hm! Rich people," said Pete, noticing the dark red hangings on the walls. A woman unrolled thick rugs for us to sit on. We sprawled on them and watched the woman pour a thick liquid from a cow-skin into a wooden bowl. An atmosphere of luxury pervaded the place. The woman's earrings were silver set with gems of curious workmanship. We drank from the bowl and found the liquid was goat's cheese. A man came in, slapping his boots with a jeweled whip, and sat down to have a bowl with us. And then they dragged out grandma.

Possibly she was great-grandma. She was very old and very withered and what was more important at that moment, very sick. She pointed to her throat, her leg, her stomach, her head, her one loose tooth, and groaned. The man and the woman looked to us despairingly.

"Well, Dr. Schroeder, here's your first case," Pete chuckled. "I do believe the old lady's sick. This is going to be good. Lemme be nurse, I'll hold the ether."

"Shut up and get that medicine out of the pack."

"Hm!" mused Harry. "Headache and sore throat. Aspirin is all we have. Fever, perhaps. Quinine, of course. Stomach-ache; cascara and a couple of C.C. pills will fix her. Leg sore, running, infected: iodine and a wet dressing. I guess the bum tooth is the only thing we can't fix. Just look at this leg, all swollen up, with an onion on it as a dressing!"

Harry washed her leg in boiled water and soap, painting it with the iodine while the old woman moaned. He put a dressing on it, and bound it up, very efficiently.

Then he selected a few pills at random and made her take them. She looked pleased. Pete lay back, snickering.

Harry got very perturbed. "This is a serious case. It needs constant attention." He put on his best bedside manner, and approached the Khan with the Hindustani conversation book. In ten minutes he was able to make the Khan understand that the sore on her leg had to be washed with soap three times a day, and that the soap must be left on the wound. The Gen explained it sloppily to the young woman.

Three little girls came in, pretty little creatures with shy, fawnlike brown eyes, dressed in bright red coats. They presented a striking picture with their tight pigtails and silver earrings. But one look at the strange white gods torturing their grandmother was enough. They turned and scampered away, wild as the goats they chased among the rocks. Beauties at twelve, at twenty-five they would be old and ugly.

The man laughed, and asked the Khan if we would care to stay for the night. "We might as well. It's six o'clock already," said Harry. "And besides, I can give this old dame another dose in the morning."

"Spaht, Genghis Khan," ordered Pete. "Chai kushna, shorba kushna." The Khan understood for the first time in his career, and we had tea, soup, and sleep without a hitch.

"To-day," said the Khan, as we put the finishing touches to the old lady, and started out, "Irkeshtam." The border!

Through the luscious green valley we proceeded toward the distant snow-peaks, passing a strange white shrine on one side, where a yak tail floated in the breeze. It was a Kirghiz holy place, alone in the mountains like the Kirghiz themselves. We went up and up, to top another pass eleven thousand, seven hundred feet high, and plunged down through a valley. The hills were covered with the holes of little yellow marmots, who sat in contented corpulence in the sun, disappearing headlong with a whisk of the tail when we came near.

Passing through a rock-bound gorge, we came suddenly upon the river, the Kizil Su, or red water. Our hearts beat faster.

A wide, open plain hemmed in by cliffs lay before us. Snow-capped mountains formed the background; the bright red river flowing swiftly through the dark red gravel of the bed made up a colorful foreground. Way over there across the torrent was a cluster of white huts, the last Russian post. Down this river was Kashgar.

We were at the very threshold of China. The Pamirs, unexplored, impassable, reared white heads to the south, cutting us off from Kashmir and India. To the east was the dreadful Takla Makan desert, Tibet the forbidden, and the pathless Gobi. To the north the Tien Shans shut out Russia and civilization. Sinkiang, Chinese Turkestan, was at our feet. A sense of vastness awed us. It was at this very river that the Polos paused on their way to the Pamirs and the land of Kublai Khan. We were going where they had gone, into the unknown. Making a resolution never to give in until we had conquered Asia, we turned our horses into the red water which flowed like the blood of Asia under our feet, and splashed our way slowly toward the white buildings across the valley.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ASIA'S WARNING

"TWO weeks ago a German scientist came through this post. He was collecting specimens of insects for a museum in Berlin. He traveled to Sim-khana, the Chinese fort, with a large amount of valuable baggage. The Chinese did not like his papers, and his mission seemed suspicious to them. They stripped the old man of all his clothes and beat his feet until he fainted from pain. Then they threw him out on the plain, naked. Somehow he managed to crawl here, three versts, and we nursed him back to health. He is now on his way to Germany.

"Yesterday the commandant of this post sent a Kirghiz in our employ as courier with a message for the chief of the Chinese fort. The boy returned half dead, tied to his horse, his back and feet beaten so badly that I doubt whether he can walk for a month. The message concerned some merchandise which we are holding here."

Ivan Ivanovitch clasped his knee, leaned back, and smiled. He was a charming young gentleman, this Ivan, endowed with all the nobler graces, and with enough buoyancy of spirit to carry them off in a warm and sincere manner. His full-lipped smile was a delight which made one feel his instant friend; his joking, laughing speech filled one with a similar lightness of spirit. He was handsome in a youthful way, with boyish blue eyes dancing merrily when he spoke. His eyes were twinkling now.

We had met him almost immediately upon our arrival at Irkeshtam. The Khan had ushered us into the presence of the customs officer, Sergius Alexis, but when that official found we could not speak Russian, he was at a loss. "Gavareety pa-fransoosky?" we had asked, and he had taken us at once to Ivan, who burst into smiling, fluent French.

Ivan examined our passports carefully, and then looked stern. "You have been in S.S.S.R. too long. You have overstayed your leave."

We showed him Gorby's letter nonchalantly. His eyes opened wide, and then he grinned. "My American friends, it is a pleasure to meet you. There, your papers are in order." He wrote something and signed his name with a flourish. "We must inspect your baggage, and then you are free to go to that damned country there. And now, what can I do to make you happy?"

We sat in his room in the Russian fort, and talked for a long time. Ivan had been eight years in the army, five of them in Asia. He sat there on his desk and regaled us with tales of his experiences, risqué jokes, and thrilling adventures.

The room was small, with a curtained alcove off it containing a cot. The usual oilcloth table, kitchen chairs, and square desk quite filled the place. On the walls were posters, all surmounted by the Soviet "pick and shovel," and written in Russian and Uzbek; pictures of officials of the Kirghiz Socialist Soviet Republic; and a large lithograph of Father Lenin. A Primus stove sat on the table, beside a kettle and a few battered cups and spoons.

We had thousands of questions, but first of all our important wants had to be considered. "We are very hungry," said Harry. "That provodnik of ours has given us nothing to eat but tea and bread for over a week."

Ivan became very considerate. "Come with me. I will give you all the food you can eat. It is native food, but we like it. A group of us here eat it every afternoon, as a relief from the army diet."

We followed him outside through the fort. It was just a large square of whitewashed walls, with one side taken up with small houses and stables. A heap of hay was in the center of the yard. We were never allowed to see much of that fort. "There are military secrets here which I cannot show you," said Ivan, as he ushered us through the little wooden gate.

The fort is situated on the top of a very steep hill overlooking the "town" itself. There isn't much left of the town. Formerly there were quite a number of mud houses clustered around the dashing mountain stream which flows from the snows above into the red river. But during the Revolution the Kirghiz destroyed the whole place, and now nothing is left but the Sovtorgflot's mansion, the rebuilt custom house, and a couple of low huts.

Ivan went into one of these huts and routed out a brown-bearded, twinkly-eyed native. After spouting Uzbek at him for a while, he took us into the Tamozhenny, or custom house, and continued his talk.

"Would you mind telling our provodnik that if he doesn't feed us better in the future we will skin him alive?

We can't seem to make him understand that when we ask for food we do not want a lesson in Hindustani. He's just dumb, that's all."

"Certainly, I will do that for you. But you can have one last meal with me before you go to China. The native dish—we call it ploff—will be ready in an hour."

We settled back to ask a few questions, now that the fate of our gnawing vitals had been settled. "What about this Chinese business? Is that true—what you told us before, about beating people's feet?"

Ivan smiled at our consternation. "That is true. They are wild, uncivilized men over there. They do not care whom they hurt."

"Well, then, what do we do about it? You surely must know them and their habits enough to give us some advice."

"Yes," said Ivan, "I will. But you must understand that only one man there speaks Russian, and he is a plain soldier. You will have difficulty making yourself understood, as you speak no Chinese or Uzbek.

"The post is commanded by a man who is virtual ruler of the place. He may do as he likes. He is governed by no law but his own wishes. If he says go, you go, stay, you stay. It all depends upon how he is feeling at the time. If he is drunk and jolly, he will let you through. If he is sober, he may keep you in jail."

"But isn't he under any authority from Pekin?"

Ivan laughed. "Pekin is six months away by caravan. Urumchi, where the Dotai, or Dzudarin as we call him, lives, is a month off. So you see this Polkovnik, this Boss, can do as he likes with you."

"How do you get round him? Don't you have trouble with him?"

"Oh, yes, we have much trouble. Just now he has closed the granitze—how do you say? The line between two countries? I have forgotten my French."

"We understand, but we have forgotten. Call it granitze."

"He has closed the granitze to all caravans, and our yard is filled with undelivered merchandise. But we can do nothing.

"We usually get round him by giving him a big banquet and making him drunk. When he is drunk, he will let us through. It is about time now for another banquet. But you cannot give him a banquet. I would advise you to give him a present and a bottle of cognac. Try to make him drink with you. That may do the trick. He is a good fellow when he is drunk. We have found that if we give him presents he will let any one through. If we could give him an automobile, he would let the whole Soviet Army through, with guns, and cannon, and horses. But we cannot get the automobile from Osh." Ivan grinned like a schoolboy. "Some day, if we wish to attack China, we will bring an automobile with us for the Bolshoie Polkovnik."

"Well, I suppose we will have to get drunk with a Chinaman." Harry sighed. "Will you write in Russian how to ask for him?"

"I will, but don't mention me or say where it came from. We do not want to get into trouble." Ivan wrote for us in capital letters: "We want to see Sir Bolshoie Polkovnika! (Big Chief) If he is not, will you permit us to proceed to Kashgar to the Russian Consul? There we will ask to see him (the Chief)."

"Learn this by heart. If the Polkovnik is not there, ask for Von-Pon-Sien. He is a Chinaman, but a good fellow, and he will help you if you tell him you are friends of mine and of the commandant of this fort. And now let us drink to your success. We have some kumys. You have tasted kumys? It is made from the fermented milk of horses. It is very healthy, especially for diseases of the lungs. Tovarisch! Kumys, pazhalsta!"

The old Uzbek came in with a cowhide, and poured us a large bowl of the white cream. It was strong, much stronger than the kumys of the Kirghiz. We drank a lot of it, and expanded genially.

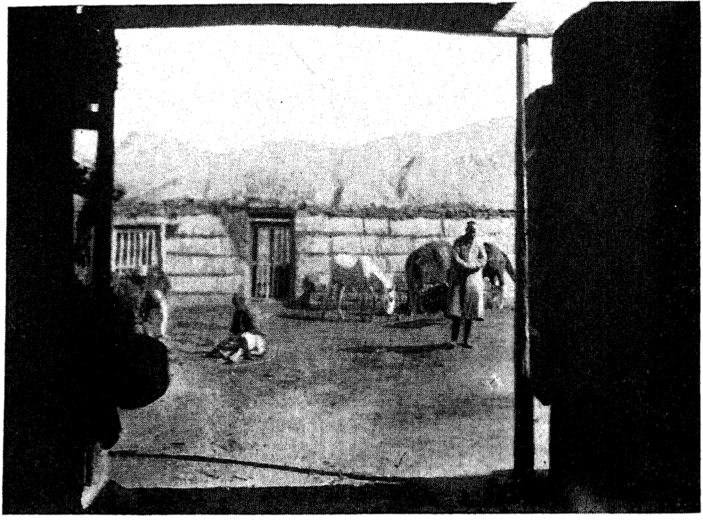
"Now I must find Comrade Tamozhenny, the customs man, and look at your baggage. Only as a matter of form, it's nothing serious."

We followed him to the house of the Sovtorgflot, where Gen had left our duffel. The Khan, the old rascal, had disappeared, probably foreseeing the complaints we would make against him and the consequent calling down. At the Sovtorgflot we found Sergius Alexis, a Slavic-looking man with pouting lips, a quick, nervous manner, and a broad smile. He grinned when he saw us. The Sovtorgflot himself was tall and stooped, and wore everlastingly a native skullcap on the back of a bald head. He was not particularly friendly, for some reason, and we suspected that there was bad blood between him and George, from the way he stiffened when George's name was mentioned. We were motioned to sit, and open our packs.

"We were at the very threshold of China." (*Page* 224)

Aleck: "Bah!" Ivan: "It is a pleasure to meet you." (*Page* 226)

"There it was! A line of low, dirty buildings far down the plain." (*Page* 239)



"The Khan led us into a yard." (*Page* 240)

"Listen, Ivan. Let's make a night of this. We have some rare old cognac in there. How about it?"

Three faces brightened at the word. We pulled it out, and finished it off in two minutes, with that infernal bottoms-up custom.

"Bah!" said Sergius Alexis, as if to say: "When we drink, we drink. We do not stop before we are drunk." Ivan grinned, and told us that Russians hated to get a taste and then stop. Taste? We were feeling quite pleasantly "on the ball" at that moment.

They looked all our stuff over, more from curiosity than from duty, being very much pleased with the chewing gum. We presented them all with a package. "And now," said Ivan, rubbing his stomach. "Ploff!"

We followed them through a few crumbling ruins into a small, dark room, weaving slightly. A circle had gathered there already, sitting on matting about the floor. Ivan introduced us.

"This is the commandant of our post." A soldier with three bars on his collar bowed slightly. He had a typical Scotch face, and smoked a stubby pipe as if in character.

"Mac," whispered Pete.

"Sh!" said Harry. "He may be Irish."

"And this is our commissar of politics." A tall young man with a thin, bony face unwound himself, stood up, and shook hands sternly.

"The commandant's wife." Wife? We made out the forms of two women there in the gloom. One of them looked at us, and returned to her chattering. She was fierce, disordered, wildly free in her movements. Coal-black eyes flashed through strands of wavy black hair.

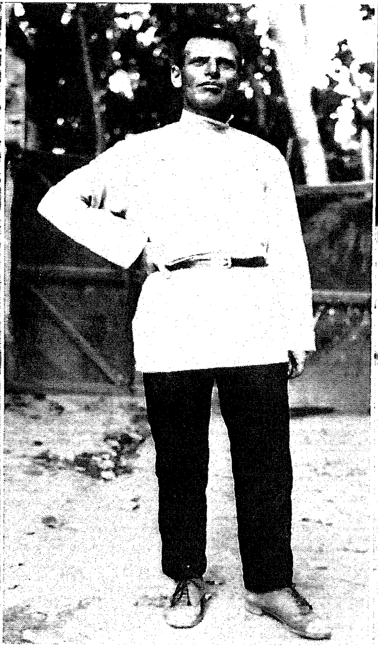
About her strong body was wrapped a long, sheepskin cloak, and little else. We had never seen a woman who looked so entirely and attractively native.

The other female in the gathering was short and dark, but her clothes and hair were clean and well-ordered. She turned a simple, childlike face to us, and smiled sweetly. Too dainty she seemed for that rough place, too frail and girlish to associate with that other woman, too unsophisticated to be the wife of the lean, hard commissar of politics. Alexis, whom we had begun to call Alec, Ivan, the Sovtorgflot, and a shaggy, squat-faced, half-breed boy made up the rest of the dinner party.

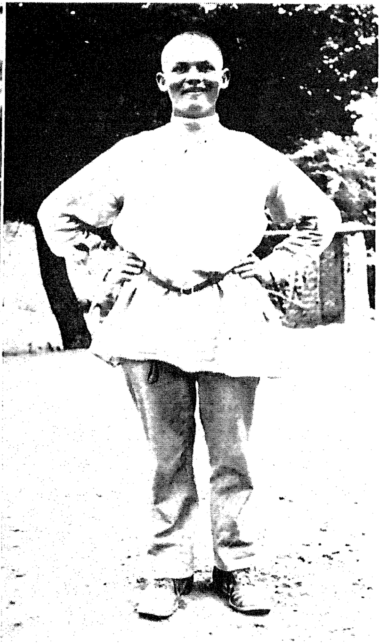
They plied us with questions, which we answered to the best of our humble knowledge—questions about America, about Russia, and about the two of them together. In the middle of the discussion the old native appeared bearing aloft a large platter of steaming brown rice, which he set on the floor in the midst of the circle. Conversation ceased at once, and the crowd hitched itself along the floor up to the dish. Most of the men sat with legs folded within reach; the wild woman of the mountains lay on her stomach with her bare feet in the air, waving them as she chewed; the pretty little wife of the Commissar sat primly near her husband, who leaned on his elbow and spread his long legs. However they sat or lay, all faced the platter in the center.

We held off for a moment to see how it was done. Only the little wife had a spoon. We watched Ivan. He leaned out, scooped up a handful of the hot, brown rice, mashed it into a ball against the side of the plate, and smeared it into his mouth. That was easy. Soon we were

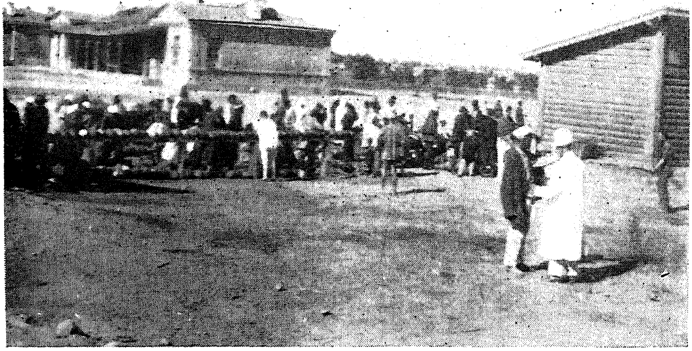
"Horse feathers!"



"George gave a party."



"Hell! We're no capitalists."



A Station Lunch Room in Siberia

"They were awfully pretty to us."

deep in the stuff. It was delicious, and not just because we were hungry.

"Aha!" choked the wild woman, hauling out a large bone which she attacked with bared teeth. A wolf-hound came gliding through the door in time to catch the stripped bone. Naturally he belonged to the woman; she *would* have a wolf-hound to set herself off.

There was no sound but the munching of the rice, the scrape of teeth against bone, and the crackle of pickled onions being chewed as an appetizer. The steaming pile of rice and meat dwindled, shrank, and was gone. The wild woman threw a last bone to her dog, Ivan sighed contentedly, the commandant scraped up the last few grains. "Cigarette?" said Ivan, resting on his elbow. Pete closed his eyes.

"And now tell us how you expect to return to America?"

"We hope to get a visa into S.S.S.R. and enter at Semipalatinsk. And then we are going on to Japan."

"Will this long journey not cost you very much money?"

"Oh, no! We haven't very much to spend. We are traveling very cheaply, and we expect to work on a ship to America."

"Are you capitalists?" Ivan eyed us suspiciously for a moment. "What do your fathers do?"

Harry looked at Pete. Pete looked at Harry. Could we tell them? After all, Ivan had been more than decent. "Well, my father is a lawyer," said Pete, ashamed for the first time in his life of that noble profession. Ivan translated. A murmur went around, but it was a murmur of regard, not of condemnation. The law must be highly respected in Russia!

"And now what does your father do?" Ivan turned to Harry, who had purposely volunteered nothing.

"My father is dead," said Harry, and stopped. How could he tell them that his old man had been in business for profit, a hated middleman in the naval stores racket. He would be branded as a speculator, than which there is no lower in the Communist scheme of things. He told part of the truth. "My father was a capitalist but he had no money!"

The circle laughed heartily. "You're all right," said Ivan. "If he had no money he was no capitalist."

"My God," Harry said to Pete later in strict confidence. "Suppose we told them how much our college education cost, and what we get for allowances!"

Ivan got so intense in the inevitable argument about Sacco-Vanzetti that he forgot to translate our sayings to the multitude. This caused a howl. "They say they're bored listening to all this la-la-la."

"Yes," Harry told him. "French *is* a damned woman's language. Let's be going. We have an appointment to get our feet beaten in China this evening."

The gathering dispersed, and we went with Ivan into Alec's place for a while. In there was an old Chinaman looking very worried. Ivan asked him his business. That business took a lot of explaining, for the old man knew little Uzbek.

"This gentleman," said Ivan to us with a broad smile, "claims to be a very important official in Sinkiang. He is here with a passport which is a year overdue. He must have crossed the border with the smugglers and stolen it. I thing he is a contrabandist."

We were properly introduced. Harry offered him a cigarette. He calmly took the package. He was very old, and very thin; his face was wrinkled and yellow, his few teeth black. He wore a black cloak with long sleeves reaching to the ground, and he held his thin body erect. A black skullcap was set on the top of his pigtailed head. He was dignified, perfectly controlled, every movement graceful and restrained, and yet one sensed something else which turned one's skin to goose-flesh. We could well understand the cold cruelty of the Chinese after seeing this man.

As he talked to Ivan, he blustered, threatened, grew suddenly suave, pleaded, was even begging querulously by turns. "He threatens me with the whole power of China and then he pleads for his freedom," grinned Ivan. The young man was having a good time. "But we must keep him until we discover more about him. His case looks suspicious to me."

"If he's such a big man in Sinkiang, we might show him our letter from the Consul to the Dotai. He might be able to read it. May we do that?"

"Certainly. But I doubt that he is what he says. These Chinese are like the fox, cunning and crafty when you are on top, but cruel beyond imagination when they have the upper hand. Show it to him."

Harry got out the folded slip of rice paper which the Chinese Consul in New York had written. The old man looked at it, turned it over, and then peered with squinting eyes. "Amelica? O-o-oh! Uh?"

Then he began to read aloud. "Nyo-o-o-o Yok la-a-ang fong-wung-low dse-e-e—" He looked up. "Nyo-o-o Yok?" We nodded. He continued aloud. "Po-o-o-o-ong too!"

Ivan grinned as the old fox sang to himself. It was finished. The gentleman got excited. "Yakshi!" he exclaimed, and tapped the letter vigorously. "Yakshi! Yakshi!" he shook it in our faces.

"He means all right. It is a good paper. It will help you. It is addressed to the Chief of Sinkiang, the Governor."

"Oh," said Pete.

"What are you going to do with this bird?" asked Harry.

"Oh, we'll keep him here for a few weeks. And if nothing comes up, we will let him go. He is guilty of a crime, but we cannot afford to anger the Chinese against us."

"May we go now? We ought to be on time for that appointment."

"Oh, yes. Nothing more to do. I will speak to your provodnik about giving you better food."

"It's not better food. It's some food we want!"

The Khan was squatting outside with the horses, looking disgruntled. Ivan talked to him for a while. Gen grew very indignant. "He says that he cannot understand you when you ask for things.

"Bunk!" exclaimed Harry, mounting his horse.

"Good-by." Pete shook hands. "We will never forget how we were treated in Russia." He was visibly affected.

"When we get home," said Harry, "we will tell everyone how the Communists acted toward two American capitalists. We will always remember it."

"You're not capitalists," retorted Ivan with a parting grin. "And don't forget to write me. If you ever need any help, if the Chinese do evil to you, there are friends in Irkeshtam and friends in Russia who will do all in their power for you. Au revoir!"

"I hope it is only au revoir," said Pete as we toiled up the hill toward the Chinese border. "There goes one hell of a perfect gentleman."

As if the benevolent influence of Russia had departed and removed with it the benevolence of Nature, it began to rain. "Dom nyeto!" chuckled the Khan. "No house!" He must have his little joke.

On the top of the hill we paused. Down below us was the little cluster of ruins, Irkeshtam. There was the Sovtorgflot's place, there to one side near the swift little stream. Among the crumbling walls was the customs office, and that single roof further off was the place where we had eaten the ploff. We saw the wild woman of the mountains run across the brook and up the hill, bare legs flashing. Alec walked about in the huge yard among piles of bales with a paper in his hand.

On a hill almost level with us was the square white fort. A soldier in the familiar red and khaki uniform groomed a horse. Ivan came out of his hut and waved. A goat chewed at the haystack. The red flag flew from the pole over it all.

Harry sneaked a picture of it with a lump in his throat. Pete broke the silence gruffly. "Hell of a fine fellow, you are! Go and drink their horse's milk and then take a picture of their fort. That's gratitude for you!"

Harry became his usual self. "But think how we can tell the folks back home how we crawled for three hours to get that picture, and were chased over the border by infuriated Communists."

Pete smiled. "Don't get like our friend Dicky now. Besides, we may never get back whole."

The Khan plodded on through the rain. He was a Chinese citizen, and there was a new spring to his step. Even the old Prophet seemed faintly relieved, now that he was almost in his own land.

"I'm just a bit worried, Pete. I don't like those stories of torture. Ivan wouldn't kid us. He isn't that sort."

"Oh, hell! We're here and we might as well face it. If old Asia gets me, she's going to have to fight mighty hard. We've come this far when by rights we ought to have hit a blank wall in Batoum. We may get through yet."

"I still don't want to have my feet beaten."

The plain above the river stretched out drab and forbidding. The rain hardly helped our spirits. We had been so busy with Ivan that we had not thought much about the Chinese up to now. Suddenly our situation burst upon us. Here we were in the center of Asia among the heathen Chinese, with no white men nearer than Russia. They could do as they liked with us, and the news would not leak out for a year. No one expected us in China; no one would know that we had not gone on. No one would worry about us except our families, and what could they do ten thousand miles away?

There it was! A line of low, dirty buildings far down the plain. As we came closer the outline of an arch became clear. The Khan whistled. There was a new note in his voice, a note of authority. "Sim-khana! Chinese fort!"

The setting sun came out, flooding the plain with brilliant yellow light. The cool, musty smell of fallen rain rose from the wet earth. A bugle sounded, clear and weird, through the evening air.

We passed under the arch. A gate led into a large courtyard. Beside the gate was a sentry box. No one was in sight. Over the gate four ancient rifles hung, rusty and worm-eaten, battered by the elements.

"Oh, well!" said Harry. "If no one comes out to meet us there can't be much order in the place. Let's bluster through as if we owned the earth. It's the only way to impress these heathen." He shouted, "Hey, you! Chop suey! Come on out and receive us properly!"

An impassive yellow devil in a sloppy gray uniform slunk out of the sentry box. His wrinkled face and slit-eyes looked evil. His pants seat hung down behind to his knees. His coat was torn and six sizes too large, and his hands were stuffed up his sleeves.

"Documenti!" ordered the Khan. Meekly we handed over our passports, our Chinese letter, the letters from Yale with the big blue seals, and a tailor bill for good luck. He took them and slunk away.

"Spaht!" ordered the Khan. We didn't want to stay there, but we followed him through the town without a word.

"Haw! Haw!" Pete gave vent to a loud horse laugh.

"There, without a doubt, is the most hopeless sight in the world."

Harry looked. In a field among the mud houses was a telegraph line. A wire led from the line to the ground. Eleven monkey-like Chinamen sat around in a circle, gazing disconsolately at a telegraph set which was connected to the wire. A forlorn fat pigtail squatted on his heels to one side with an expression of extreme puzzlement on his face. Harry burst into a roar of laughter. Eleven Chinamen about a busted telegraph! Nothing could be more hopelessly futile.

Pete was still chuckling as the Khan led us into a yard. A smiling native bowed to Gen, and showed us into a dark little room in a mud hut. We unpacked. The room was at least eight feet square!

"We might as well go to bed. Nothing else to do. And I suppose we find out when we go in the morning?"

The floor was muddy and hard, but we were soon asleep. The Khan woke us up later as he came in. "Genghis Khan? How about it?"

"Zaftra paidoot," muttered the Khan.

In the morning we could go! On to Kashgar! That tailor bill must have done the trick. "Are you sure it's zaftra?"

"Zaftra!" said the Khan, very definitely. The relief was pleasant after our worries. Zaftra! To-morrow! Dear old zaftra! We heaved a huge sigh, and began to count the four days more before Kashgar, the goal.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ZAFTRAS AND POSTLI-ZAFTRAS

Now it is not good for the Christian's health to hustle the Aryan brown,
For the Christian riles, and the Aryan smiles and he weareth the Christian down;
And the end of the fight is a tombstone white with the name of the late deceased,
And the epitaph drear: "A Fool lies here who tried to hustle the East."

Rudyard Kipling

A MILLION yelling Chinese devils were chasing Pete across an endless burning desert. Pete ran until his lungs were bursting, but on they came, shouting and waving rusty rifles. One cry seemed to be repeated and echoed by the screaming multitude: "Zaftra!" Closer and closer they came, and hard as Pete ran, slowly but surely the leading devils drew up to him. Pete's legs seemed filled with lead; he strained to distance those yellow devils, but his muscles refused to obey his will. A fiendish grin came over the face of the nearest; Pete could feel the hot, stinking breath of the creature on his neck. With a superhuman effort he turned and kicked at the face. It only grinned, and shouted "Zaftra!"

Harry awoke with a start as Pete's foot landed violently on his neck. Pete let out a screech and sat up, staring. The million devils were gone in a flash of light. But the leader, he of the fiendish grin and the hot breath, refused to disappear as Pete came to his senses. He stood framed in the doorway, a sloppy figure in a gray uniform, his overlarge coat wrapped about him, the seat of his trousers hanging behind to his knees. He held a rusty rifle by the barrel. As he saw our look of bewilderment, his wrinkled face broke into an evil smile, and his slit-like eyes gleamed cruelly.

"What the devil is he doing here?" He made no move. Shifting from one foot to the other, he regarded us long and curiously.

"I guess we'd better not pay any attention to him," said Harry, trying to appear as if a dirty Chinese soldier on guard were a common thing in his young life. "We'll just go on as though he weren't here."

The grinning soldier watched curiously as we dressed. Only when we attempted to go outside the hut did he move. He barred our way with his rifle. We returned to our seats.

Harry was frightened. "I really think we are under arrest."

"The indications seem to point to that conclusion," said Pete caustically. "What are we going to do about it?"

Harry had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Somehow the idea of arrest in the heart of Asia did not appeal to him. There was no one, no one within a thousand miles who could help. With a supreme effort he made his voice appear calm. "The first thing is to get out of this hut. After that we can let things take their course. Let's try to talk to old Confucius there. Hey, you, gavareety pa-rooski?"

Confucius grinned and looked blank. He did not seem to be a very intelligent person. Perhaps he would listen to reason, but there was no way of reasoning with him.

The Khan? The Prophet? Those two had left no trace. We tried force again, gently attempting to push past him. He resisted with barred gun.

"Money, Harry. Get out some of that filthy Kashgar stuff and show it. Money may talk where we can't."

Harry took out five of the large notes and waved them before his face. Confucius grabbed for them. Harry put them beyond his reach and pointed to the doorway. The soldier made a diabolic face, and nodded. We walked out into the courtyard, free.

But we were not wholly free. Confucius followed at a safe distance behind. We tested the limit of our freedom by walking out into the street. He made no move to stop us. It seemed that the ends of the town were our boundaries.

Like a faithful dog Confucius followed us back into the yard. We discovered the Khan entertaining a crowd of natives. We shouted, relieved at finding what we thought was a friend.

"Genghis Khan! Gen, you old hyena, Kashgar to-day? Sevodnya paidoot?" The usual note of confidence was lacking in Pete's voice as he put his arm affectionately about the Khan's shoulders.

"Zaftra," muttered the Khan, hardly deigning to look at him.

Harry pointed to Confucius standing sloppily near by. "Why this business? Why Chinese soldier?"

The Khan gave him a withering look and shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Ya n'znay't." He turned back to his friends.

"It looks as if we have to stay here until to-morrow.

We might as well make the best of it." We walked about the courtyard.

Jail wasn't such a bad place after all. A group of low mud huts were built in the form of a quadrangle, which was entered through a rough arch closed by heavy doors. One side looked a little more luxurious than the other; the doorways of the huts had hangings to shut out the light and air; little porches built of brush roofs covered with mud afforded an open shelter from the drizzling rain.

The end of the yard was shut off by the stables. We ascertained this not by the fact that the stables were different from the other mud huts, but by the presence of a pile of manure before the narrow door.

Our quarters made up one section of the other side. A blank wall reached from our room to the stable. At right angles to our little hut was another hut almost exactly like it, making a corner the edge of which led to the gate. Along this corner near the entrance was an oven set in the wall, where a filthy native stirred something in a flat iron cauldron. Strips of meat hung above the oven, a bag of rice lay on the muddy ground, a container resembling the gas tank of a Ford stood on its end near by, filled with dirty gray water. The native dipped some of this water into the pot, spitting over the bag of rice.

The yard was deep in mud, and wide puddles covered most of it. We slopped through a puddle and grabbed the Khan away from his native friends. "We want some food, damn you! And don't you start that infernal 'Hindustanka beefsteak, Uzbekska beevesteke' business. Get us some anda." A blank look was on the grimy face of the guide.

"Anda, you dog! Anda! Or perhaps baiza. Hurry up. They both mean eggs."

Gen must have retained some impression of what Ivan had told him, for he disappeared. In a few minutes he returned with eleven eggs. Harry had the frying pan out, and was warming it over a little fire which he had built in the kibitka. The hole in the roof worked extremely well for native chimneys; fully a third of the smoke swirled through it. Pete cracked an egg.

"God, what a stench! This must be one of the real Genghis Khan's eggs. And another!" Seven out of eleven were bad. We sent the Khan out to get another eleven. Only five of those could be eaten.

"Eleven must be the Uzbek dozen," said Harry, scrambling the mess. "Or else he keeps one for commission."

The little room was dark and full of smoke. It was completely bare, except for a few felts which covered half the floor. Blackened mud bricks on one side made up the fireplace; the roof was built of stripped logs covered with branches, and made water-tight by a thick coating of clay. From time to time large drops of mud would splash from the roof and dry upon the felt-covered floor, or sizzle in the fire.

As we ate people continually dropped in to chat with the Khan and to gaze in wonder at us, the queer strangers. These natives, Chinese and Tartar alike, have a delightful habit of spitting on the floor wherever they happen to be squatting. As we slept on that floor we were annoyed. Besides, it was unsanitary. We decided to pass a rule dealing with the offenders.

Natives seemed to be under us, around us, on top of us when we had finished our breakfast. Confucius stood just outside the door, but the others flocked inside. Spat, went somebody. Pete and Harry arose, seized him by the arms, and led him none too gently outside. The Khan and his friends followed. Everyone looked hurt. We explained by spitting, shaking our heads, and pointing to the hut.

After that we were eagle-eyed in spotting an offender of the Sanitary Code. For one more native outside meant one less inside to bother us. Even the Khan was not allowed to indulge in his favorite sport. And as for the Prophet, we made him behave in one hard lesson. In one hour we ousted eighteen natives.

A jolly old gentleman came in the door, nodding to Confucius, who was leaning silently against the door-post with his hands stuffed up his sleeves. The newcomer seemed to be a cheerful soul. His face was covered by a tangle of whiskers, the mustache blending with the long beard which grew out and down in two spadelike points. He wore the long black robe of the native, held in by two colored handkerchiefs with a flat leather purse dangling from them. Under the robe showed two black, sloppy pointed boots. He smiled at us, and touched his wide hat of yellow fox fur.

"Pair-o'-woodchuck," said the Khan, showing him some sign of respect.

"Really," muttered Pete. "I've always wanted to meet a live one. So he's the pair-o'-woodchuck, is he?"

He sat down dumpily, and began to chatter to Gen. The Prophet came in, and soon three beards were waggling in unison. We interrupted. "Us Kashgar?" He shrugged his shoulders and grinned. Apparently he had nothing to say about it.

"I think it would be a good idea if we showed a little authority around here. Let's dress up in our English explorers' outfits, hang everything we can find on us, and head for the seats of the Mighty with some cognac." Pete was agreeable, and so we dressed in shorts, slung cameras, compasses, knives, instruments, and badges around our persons, and walked out toward the fort. Confucius trotted along dumbly.

The whole post consisted of five or six large quadrangles of huts and walls, all made of mud brick. They spread on both sides of a wide street, the beginning of the road to Kashgar. Along the street flowed a muddy ditch, which branched into smaller ditches at each of the groups of buildings. Not a soul was in sight as we plowed through wide puddles and jumped ditches toward the fort, that first building we had seen the day before, with the rusty rifles hanging over the arch.

The arch opened into a large square, surrounded by low houses. Pete noticed that one of the guns was missing from its accustomed place, for now there were only three where there should be four. Harry glanced behind; there was the fourth. Confucius carried it!

No one was in the sentry box, but quite a crowd had collected across the courtyard at another arch, which led into a smaller court. We came boldly up to them. "Kashgar?"

A soldier looked scornfully in our direction for a moment. "Zaftra!" he spat, and turned his back.

"Commandant!" we insisted. "Bolshoie Polkovnik!"

An ancient Chinaman with a wrinkled, scowly face leered at us. "Nyeto!" he muttered. "Kashgar!" The Chief of the post, the gentleman for whom we had the cognac, was in Kashgar! Well, we had to see some one. We forced ourselves upon them, and made them take some notice of us.

Pete shouldered his huge bulk into the center of the indifferent mob, and took the place of a dirty yellow man who was chattering. Pete took off his hat. There was a gasp of astonishment as his brilliant red hair flashed into their eyes. From then on they were very attentive.

"Look, you bastards!" said Pete, loudly. He thrust forward the lapel of his hunting coat. Stuck in it like a detective badge was a New York State fishing license. The onlookers crowded around to read it. "1928 State of New York. License to hunt and fish." They fell back, impressed. Pete produced a pocket compass which was hanging on his belt. They crowded about again, staring at the quivering needle. "Now," said Pete softly. "Bolshoie Polkovnik."

A young Chinese who seemed more intelligent than the rest stepped up. He was tall and smooth-shaven, with a high forehead and rather round, staring eyes. He wore a long black cloak which reached to the ground, and a little black skullcap. He smiled. "Nyeto!" (He isn't here!) And then he whispered, "Zaftra."

We became a bit angry. But argument was of no avail. The only answer was "Zaftra!" We turned to go, sadly. A creature danced up, a strange-looking thing with the voice of a girl and the dress of a pink-ribboned boy. His (or her) soft black hair was bobbed on one side and clipped on the other, and he (or she) wore a colored skullcap over it. The long cloak was resplendent with embroidery and colored bits of cloth and designs of an evident Chinese variety. In its hand was a carved stick from the end of which hung a long, soft white bunch of horse-hair. The thing waved the tassel in our faces. "Zaftra!" it giggled. "Zaftra." It danced about us gleefully. What was particularly offensive to us, who had smelled the smells of man and Nature for so long, was the reeking perfume which this girl-boy exuded.

"God!" exclaimed Harry, as we finally got rid of it. "Nothing on this earth would give me more pleasure than to land my fist in that's face. It looks like the young of those fellows who used to work in harems."

It was a relief to get back to the familiar stench of the unwashed Khan. We now turned to him as the only friend we had, and he failed us. We could find no fault with him; he did his work as he always had, sloppily, but we sensed a change in him. No more did he listen to our struggles in Russian and Hindustani with a grin. He seemed morose and unduly authoritative; he ordered us around, and he did what he wished without asking. We longed for a familiar come-back of "Hindustanka horse feathers, Rooska horse feathers" as we longed for the Khan's screeching songs and pointless jokes. But he paid us little attention outside of his duties.

We took stock of the situation back in our kibitka. We were still confident of Kashgar, which lay to the east only four days away. Four short days! And we had the promise of the Chinese that we could go "zaftra." If they refused the next day we had Ivan's Russian note asking for permission to go to the Russian Consul in Kashgar; we had the name of Von-Pon-Sien, which might prove an entering wedge into the presence of the Commandant; we had two bottles of cognac, if we could make the Chief drink; and we had any number of impressive letters and old passports. The best we could do was to keep trying.

Suddenly the wind was taken out of our sails. A Chinaman in a new uniform came in the door. He was quite a young fellow, and he had a nice frank face as Chinese go. Harry popped the question. "Kashgar zaftra?"

The young soldier smiled. "Postli-zaftra." He turned, said a few words to the ever-present Confucius, and went away.

The *day after* to-morrow! That was how they did things! The Mexican "mañana" was outdone. Two days more in that hole!

It was Pete who brought the Expedition into some semblance of order. "Kashgar is our aim. We'll get there if it takes all summer. Let's wait."

Confucius popped his head in as we were calming down. He gesticulated violently, made an awful face, and looked woebegone. It was the first time he had made any overtures. He muttered a few words. Harry called for the Khan to see what he wanted. Gen listened and turned to us. "Bemaree," said the Khan, and waited.

"Bemaree? What's that? Does he want money?"

Gen shook his head. Then he repeated the word. We looked blank. The Khan made an effort to remember something. He scratched his head, lifting his shaggy hat.

His face broke into a grin, the first grin for days. "Him bolnoy." He rubbed his stomach and groaned. A light began to dawn.

"Oh, he's sick, is he?" Harry was concerned. "Where?"

Gen asked Confucius. He frowned, and ran his hands over his body in a general sweep. "Huh!" said Harry. "All over. I guess we can give him all the dope we have."

Harry looked him over with a professional eye, prodding him. At every prod Confucius grunted. Harry checked it off. "Sore throat—aspirin. Belly-ache—cascara. Bothersome fellow hanging around all the time—double the dose of cascara. Chinese soldier—quadruple it. Oh, I'll take care of Confucius, all right. I'll keep him busy." Harry got a cup of water, and made the willing Confucius swallow five pills. "Better give him some chloradine for good measure. Won't hurt him."

It was over. Confucius assured the Khan he felt much better already, and went outside to spread the news.

Over thirty natives crowded about our door, yelling and clamoring buzzily. "What do they want?" asked Pete. "Make them get away from here."

"They bemaree," answered the Khan complacently, as if thirty natives all bemaree meant nothing in his young life.

Harry gloated joyously. "Here's where I get enough patients to last me some time. That may be the only mob I ever see outside my office, and I'm going to make the most of it. The best part about this is that I don't care if I kill a few; they're only natives."

Pete stretched out, his usual procedure before and after meals, and when there was nothing to do, he yawned and began to clean his camera.

"Come on, Pete. You've got to help me. Every good Doc has an *ass*istant. I think a set form of diagnosis is the best when you're dealing wholesale. Let's see, we don't want to kill them all. I've got it. Iodine and mercurochrome for skins, and for general effect because of the color. Eyes—boric acid, and—anything internal, aspirin and cascara. We'll tie a string around their chests; if they are sick above the line, it's aspirin, below the line, cascara. We'll go heavy on the cascara; we don't want them to come back and say they aren't cured. The Khan can be nurse and interpreter and look after the histories. He'll be good at that."

Pete showed some signs of life. "Great stuff, Dr. Schroeder, I'm with you. First patient!"

We both broke into feverish activity. "Gimme that aspirin, he pointed to his head."

"How about this guy? He pointed to his chest!"

"Aspirin!"

"Well, this bird is queer. That doesn't look like his stomach and yet it's below the line!"

"Give him one aspirin and one cascara, it looks pretty close to me."

A Chinese soldier came in pointing to his leg. We made him take off his boot and sock, if it could be called a sock. Dr. Schroeder was at it in an instant with iodine. Suddenly he stopped, and looked at Pete. "Look at this. Bad, isn't it? Hey, Genghis Khan, make him do this. Yes, off." Harry paused. "Venereal. What now?"

"Out," said Pete. "And sterilize your hands."

"Well, come on. We've got to finish the job. Twenty-eight—twenty-nine, thirty, and a little girl."

Her father brought her whining and pulling away. She was pretty, with her pigtails and fat little face. All over her chest and back were dried scabs, cracked and bleeding in places. "God, what do we do for this? We can wash it, and sterilize it with mercurochrome, but we have no salve." She moaned as we sponged it off with warm water. And when we put the red stuff on she burst into a wail of tears. Her father slapped her. We bound the sores up as best we could, and left her father bowing low to us.

But we were by no means finished. The man who had the room next to us bowed very low, and invited us in, serving us with sweet tea. A rich rug was on the floor; several boxes, and a couple of silk robes were scattered about. The man was in the usual native garb, the long quilt robe with overlong sleeves, the golden fox hat of a wide, circular fur, and the colored handkerchief about the waist. He was very polite, quiet, and dignified. After a time he pointed to his eyes. "Bemar." He was no common native to associate with the rabble in a public clinic. His position demanded that he be a private patient. We looked closer.

"It's trachoma, Pete. We'll have to be careful."

"We've got to do something for the old boy. He's a nice fellow."

We made him a mixture of boric acid, as it was the only thing we had for the eyes. He was very grateful, and felt better almost at once. He saved the bowlful that we had given him for several days, using it religiously. And even more religiously he made a special point of coming up to us every time he saw us to thank the two American doctors. Certainly we gave our first private patient plenty of attention, for there was nothing else to do in the place.

The clinic went on the next morning and boasted a total of twenty-five patients. Some of them were repeaters, and therefore we gave them a little extra of the below-the-line medicine to keep them away. And then we tried for the elusive Kashgar once more.

The Khan raked up a bearded man who looked more like a Russian than any of the others. He must have been a half-breed, for there were certainly no Russians in Chinese Sim-khana. He had an air about him which made us trust him at once. We gave him Ivan's message, and followed him to the fort.

The smooth-faced youth who had smiled the day before talked to him for some time. And then we were taken into the presence of the nice-looking soldier whom we had seen, he of the bad news of "postli-zaftra." The answer was the same. "Postli-zaftra." Apparently time stood still in that place. To-morrow never arrived on schedule in China.

"Yesli razrashieti, razrashieti. Ne razrashieti, ne razrashieti," said our bearded part-Russian with a shrug. It seemed to mean, "If you are allowed, you are allowed. If you are not allowed, you are not allowed." What a complicated way of saying "It's the will of Allah!"

"But we are an American expedition financed by the American government."

Smooth-Face laughed, none too nicely.

"Well, then, we are a Russian expedition on a special mission."

There was no mirth in Smooth-Face's eyes as he smiled grimly. A sour look appeared. He shook his head.

"Give us our passports, then." They were produced, probably because they were worthless. Perhaps the yellow devils knew that they could have everything in the end, when our bodies were floating down that red river below the bluff.

Harry opened the letter from the Chinese Consul. "Here, look at this, it's big medicine."

Smooth-Face shook his head, and the soldier smiled quite blankly. They couldn't read.

"Well, we know your commander Von-Pon-Sien. Take us to him. Von-Pon-Sien."

A roar of laughter greeted this. "Von-Pon-Sien!" Girl-Boy giggled and capered. "Von-Pon-Sien!" they mocked. "Von-Pon-Sien!" They followed us, shouting and laughing yellow laughter.

We were quite angry when we returned to our hut. Didn't citizens of America have any rights in that lousy country? We had done nothing, meant no wrong, were innocent of evil intent. What was the U.S.A. for if not to protect its citizens? But we soon discovered by a few quiet inquiries among the natives that they had never heard of America. At any rate, most of them looked blank when the Khan told them our native land. Perhaps the Khan didn't know either that there was such a place. To most natives it seems that white people live in one general country to the westward, indicated by a sweep of the arm and a willingness to believe all sorts of strange tales.

Confucius had nothing to offer in the way of consolation. He didn't even know "zaftra," which was just as well for our patience. "Zaftra" became the bugbear of our existence. The only thing worse than "zaftra" was "postli-zaftra." And again it was "postli-zaftra" when we asked the Khan the next morning how things stood.

"There must be some person in this place who has authority. If we try hard enough we can see him. They'll get bored with us and give in sooner or later." Harry was in favor of the persistent method. We dressed again in our best explorer's costume, and presented ourselves once more at the fort.

Girl-Boy could not deter us. Smooth-Face and Clean Soldier stopped us for only a moment. We gave them some of their own medicine. Instead of "zaftra," however, we murmured insistently and without expression "Bolshoie Polkovnik." The answer came as often as we said it, "Nyeto!" Well, if the Big Chief was away, how about the Little Chief? We changed our words to "Malinka Polkovnik." And this is the time for a bit of friendly advice to all travelers into China. If you can't get what you want, sit.

We sat, followed, murmured. Girl-Boy stopped grinning. We insisted. We pulled out our calling cards and presented them. It worked. We were taken across the courtyard under the further arch, and sent into a room on the left. We passed a big flat drum and a huge metal gong hanging beside the door.

The room was dark and gloomy. A wide seat filled half of it, a seat covered with pillows and draperies high up off the floor. We sat on the seat in front of a snoring

Chinaman who was fast asleep with his hand on a weird-looking banjo. There was a table covered with papers near the door; a Chinese writing outfit of a flat inkstone and a few pointed brushes was partly covered by the mess. We held our breath. We were in a den, anyway, if not the actual den of the mighty.

Girl-Boy entered backward, bowing low, and flicking his absurd fly-swatter before him. And after Girl-Boy came the most fearsome individual we could imagine.

He was dressed in black silk, with a silk skullcap. He carried in his long, tapering fingers an ivory wand. Those fingers impressed you before you even looked at the face. Strong, cruel, and yet delicate, they played with the wand, their long sharp, gleaming nails clicking against the cold ivory.

We looked up and stared, horrified. He was old, very old, and the face was wrinkled and seamed. The mouth was small and almost pointed, the lips thin and hard. The teeth were black behind the sharp lips.

The eyes did not impress as much as the mouth. They were too deeply set in the pouched lids to be seen. But when the creature smiled, oh, so slightly, our skins quivered on our spines.

He was graceful, dignified. Every movement was suave, controlled, icy. Such a man could not possibly show passion, or friendship, or human feeling. He was as cold as the ivory wand which he tapped gently against his hand. We could imagine a flick of that wand, a click of those nails sending a human being to the vilest torture.

Our knees shook as we bowed. He answered with a slight nod, his face a mask of parchment. He had the dignity of a corpse, the body of a girl, the hands of an artist, and the face of the Devil himself. We bowed again, and offered him a cigarette lighter neatly wrapped in toilet paper. He took it, bowed, and handed it back to us. We had the Khan with us, and we made him ask if the gentleman would drink a little cognac. Our request went to the Khan in Russian, to our bearded half-breed, who had come in unexpectedly, in Uzbek. It was translated by the old man whom the Khan called the "pair-o'-woodchuck" into western Chinese from Turki dialect, and Smooth-Face rendered it into eastern Chinese to the man—or was he Devil? The answer came back by the same route. "No, he did not drink."

He stood there quietly, calmly, coldly. Girl-Boy waved the horse-tail fly-swatter over his head. We sent another question. We were American students bound for Kashgar. We dared not lie to that face.

While our question was going its route, Girl-Boy picked up a green enamel opium pipe from a shelf, and prepared it. He held it in the Devil's mouth, and lighted a taper. The Devil drew in deeply, sucking softly. Girl-Boy put the pipe aside.

Our answer came back. The Khan made us understand that a telegram had been sent to Kashgar for permission to let us through. When an answer came, we would know.

We tried once more. We produced the letter from the Consul of China. It was waved aside with an almost imperceptible movement of the wand. We insisted. A Chinaman stepped forward. Ah, he could read. "Nyo-o-o-o yok! La-a-a-ang fong wung low dse-e-e-e-e-e—" The figure stiffened. The wand waved in a short sweep. The reader fell back, returned the letter. The figure turned without a sound, and glided out. Girl-Boy leered at us over his shoulder.

"Whew!" We walked back, speechless. Not until we were safe in the familiar kibitka did we speak.

"What's the idea, Genghis Khan?"

"Yes, are we going to Kashgar?"

Gen took a mouthful of naas from his little gourd. "Telegram paidoom, paidoot. Ne paidoom, ne paidootne."

"What he means is: telegram come, we go. Doesn't come, we don't go." It was not exactly Russian, but we understood the Khan. We had built up quite a vocabulary of Khanisms.

"When telegram come?"

"Telegram paidoom, prediote, ne paidoom, ne paidootne," said the Khan with a shrug. That became a song with us, a meaningless theme for the futility of attempting to conquer Asia. The Khan would say nothing more than that.

"Now, listen, Genghis Khan. Telegram ne paidoom pretty damn soon, paidoot Osh! We're not going to sit here all summer."

"Telegraph prediote, paidyote, ne paidoom, ne paidoot," answered the Khan complacently. He warmed to his subject. He shook his fist in our faces, ours, his masters'. "Telegram ne paidoom, ne paidoot Osh ne paidoot Kashgar. Ne telegram, ne paidoot."

Good Lord! No telegram, no go. That was serious. We told the Khan very firmly that if the permission did not arrive for us to go to Kashgar, we would return to Osh.

"Tak!" said the Khan, resignedly. But we noticed that he leered when he agreed.

The days passed very slowly. The clinic took very little time. We twiddled our thumbs and waited for the telegram to come. Chinese came staring, poking, fiddling with our stuff. We exercised the rule against spitting. We smoked. We ate eggs, and we pestered Confucius, who remained always near us.

Our hearts were touched by him one day. A Chinese soldier actually showed some gratitude. He appeared one evening with a large bunch of radishes. We thought he wanted us to buy them, but caught his look of pain when we started to refuse. "No money," said the Khan. "Him bemaree. Now all right." He was trying to show his appreciation to us for having dosed him up with cascara. We took them and Confucius looked very pleased. We were deeply impressed.

Knowing that it was unhealthy to eat fresh vegetables, we boiled them. After two hours we could cut the greens with a sharp knife. Boiled radishes! Real health food with lots of roughage! The sentiment behind them made up for any deficiency in their taste. We forced ourselves to eat them for lunch as Confucius was watching. He refused a proffered helping. Perhaps they were what had made him sick.

Confucius and the "pair-o'-woodchuck" didn't seem to get along. The soldier gave that dignitary a dirty look when he came in. He seemed to be very rich, to own the whole place, to be the interpreter, to have charge of all the food. His jolly face was worried now. He talked to the Khan a minute, and then addressed us personally. We

The Morning Clinic. The door to the left is our office.

"Syem sal balanchok nyeto."

"Vot balanchok!" (*Page* 263)

liked the old fellow; he was willing, and always had a smile for us.

He cleared his throat, and toyed with the purse which dangled from his belt. "Bemaree!"

"You?"

"Nyet, zhena," said the Khan. His wife was sick.

And very, very sick! He rubbed his stomach. "Syem sal balanchok nyeto." Syem—seven, nyeto—there isn't any! His wife hadn't had a balanchok for seven sal!

"That's too bad. We are awfully sorry and all that sort of thing. What do you want us to do?"

"Medicine," grunted the Khan.

"I don't understand balanchok and I don't get sal."

The Khan only grunted, "Syem sal balanchok nyeto."

"Seven sal without a balanchok? Seven sal—seven—hm!—seven—" Harry mused a moment. "Sal—it must be seven days without a balanchok. She's just constipated, that's all. Where is she and we'll find out?"

"No," said the "pair-o'-woodchuck." "Give me!"

"But we have to see our patients before we treat them. No see, no medicine, no balanchok!"

"All right," grinned the old man. He took us across the yard into his own house. There she lay reclining on a low couch dressed in silk of red and yellow, with long silver earrings. She looked healthy, young, and exceedingly pretty, lying there dressed like a gypsy. We asked where she was sick. She put her ringed hand on her stomach, with a startled look at us.

Dr. Schroeder began. He held her hand and felt her pulse. Then he pulled down her eyelids, and stared into the eyes. He made her show her tongue. He tried her knee jerk, and she giggled shyly. She was very frightened at first. "Now," he said. "What is it?"

She arose, squatted down, and began to moan. The Khan talked to her, broke into a loud laugh, and he too squatted and moaned. A light dawned.

"It's cascara this time, for sure, Pete. Poor thing! Seven days! No wonder she's sick. We'd better give her five of 'em to make sure. Seven days is a long time." Harry dealt out five red pills, and made her take them with water. He was exuberant in his diagnosis. We walked out feeling genial at having saved a life that day.

"Now," said Harry to the jolly old man, who was trying to thank him and bow at the same time, "to-morrow morning there will be a balanchok."

"Pair-o'-woodchuck" looked at him, awed. He hardly had the light of belief in his eyes, and yet he dared not disbelieve the opinion of a great American doctor. Finally he smiled. "If there is balanchok to-morrow morning, I give you hundred horses."

Harry was surprised, but he thought the old man was joking. "Oh, that's all right." He dismissed it with a gesture of confidence. "You'll see. If it isn't to-morrow morning, it will be to-morrow afternoon. They ought to work by then."

The old man mumbled in his beard, and went away. We returned to our hut. In a few moments there was a long line of old men before it. And they said that *they* hadn't had a balanchok for several sal. We reopened the clinic and treated them all. It was easy this time. Two sal —two cascara; five sal—five cascara; nine sal—nine cascara, and so forth. They went away satisfied.

Pete glanced through the Hindustani conversation book to pass away the time. Suddenly he looked up. "Great God! It says here that sal means *years!* What have we done? Seven days may be likely, but seven years, that's impossible!" Yes, there it was: sal, year. We rushed out to the old man.

"What does balanchok mean? We don't understand! Tell us, quick!"

He hemmed and hawed, and made all sorts of signs which we did not get.

We saw a piece of manure on the ground. "There's a balanchok!"

His eyes took on a look of astonishment. "Oh, no! That no balanchok." He glanced across the yard. He pointed. "Vot balanchok! VOT BALANCHOK!"

A little child was playing in the dirt!

"Oh," said Harry seriously. "As for that, I don't know and you don't know. Only Allah knows." He pointed up majestically.

"You no good doctor," said the old man disgustedly.

And then it hit us. We rolled on the ground. We raised the place with our guffaws. We had promised him an infant for the next day! What a shame to lose a hundred horses in that way! We were still chuckling sporadically that evening, after returning from a stroll to the river with Confucius. We wandered about the yard pointing at children and muttering "Vot balanchok!" We went into the stables to see the horses, snickering.

There was only one donkey in the stable. Something brought us up with a jerk, some vague suspicion. We rushed back to our hut.

The Prophet's baggage was nowhere to be seen. The Khan's saddles and harness were gone. His gunny-sack with his extra shirt was missing.

We tore out into the yard and met the "pair-o'-woodchuck." He smiled at us until he saw our wild stare. "Where's the provodnik? Where's Genghis Khan?"

He gave us a look of sympathy. "Provodnik paidoot. Gone. Kashgar one—two—three hours. Friend also."

There was nothing to be done but go back into the hut. The Khan was gone! Gone! The guide had deserted.

Harry looked idly at his small pack. It was open, the contents disarranged. He felt inside half-heartedly. The bundle of Chinese money was gone, gone with the Khan and the Prophet.

Pete happened to see something shining on the mantelshelf. He reached for it dully. It was a large safety-pin, the kind we had in our blankets. The Khan had been begging for one all summer. He had left it behind.

Smooth-Face Chinaman came to the door and looked in. Harry stared at him, unseeingly. He was whispering something. "Postli-zaftra!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CONQUEST OF ASIA

The whip that's lost always had a golden handle.

Turki Proverb

IF John Orloff had not come at the right time we should probably have gone under. The irking restraint of those six hard days had worn us down. Six days of fruitless arguing in languages of which we knew two or three words was not conducive to peace of mind. Our nerves had gone to pieces some time before; we bickered and argued pettily between ourselves; we cursed and swore violently at the Chinese about us. Up to this point there had been nothing definite, nothing concrete upon which to base our anger but the delay and the lack of intelligence of a bunch of Chinese. Genghis Khan's treachery had turned the whole of our unrest into a strong and unreasoning anger. We continued to keep the hope of Kashgar in mind, if only for the pleasure of bringing the Khan to some vague and terrible justice.

John was coming through the post from Kashgar to Russia. He made quite a commotion while he waited near the fort. We saw a white man, and ran madly up to him.

"Do you speak English?" said Pete breathlessly, and a bit inconsistently, considering the situation and the geographical location of the Chinese post.

The answer was amazing. "Oh, yes! I can speak English."

Somehow the fact that the first white man we had seen in China spoke our language failed to startle us. Pete took it calmly enough, and Harry merely began to tell him our position, and the fix we were in. It seemed logical that he should speak English. Why shouldn't he?

John Orloff was rather messy-looking to our eyes. We failed to realize that we were even messier. He was dressed very sloppily, his beard was half grown, his hair long and untidy. When we first saw him, he was shouting Chinese at the crowd which stared at him and his baggage. We took him away with us immediately, and dosed him up with cognac in honor of the occasion.

He spoke English very badly. He was the dragoman to the Russian Consul in Kashgar, and was traveling back home with his young son for the first vacation in four years. He had left his boy, a fearless little fellow who knew a few Chinese swear words, to watch the baggage.

"What are we going to do? Here we are without a guide and the Chinese won't let us move. Will you tell us what we can do about it?"

John laughed. His peasant face was rough, reminding us somewhat of a lumberjack, but there was a heartiness about him which made us feel friendly at once. "These damn Chinese are bad like children. They know nothing. They are cowards. When I want something, I shake my fist in their face and they give it." He took a long pull from our bottle.

"Yes, but what about us?"

"This cognac is very good. I have not tasted such good cognac for four years. But the women, ah! Native women—"

We finally got him moving, and made him promise to take us to see the "Big Chief" at once. His bluster left him as we made our way to the fort, and asked to see the Commandant. He was quite cowed, and very quiet, when we were ushered into the Presence.

In a richly appointed room deep in the fort four men were gathered about a lacquer table. Beside each man was a small stool, holding a cup of tea and an opium pipe. Smooth-Face was there, as was Clean Soldier, and the Devil himself. Girl-Boy flicked imaginary flies from the withered neck of the Chief, and ran to refill teacups. On the table was a huge pile of money, and a wall of ivory squares. They were playing Mah-Jong!

"Pong!" said Smooth-Face as we entered. The other three were silent. We were motioned to a chair by a twitch of Smooth-Face's head, and Girl-Boy brought us some tea. John made no sound.

It was a very serious game, played for high stakes. Large fistfuls of bills passed, mostly from the three subordinates to the Chief. The fourth man was losing heavily. He had a long thin face, with pouting lips which leered when he lost. He took it very badly.

With a subdued "Mah-Jong" from the Chief the game broke up. Thin-Face left in a huff, the others took long drags from the pipes and looked at John. No one paid us the slightest attention.

John began to speak pleadingly. We will never know if he was speaking for us, but probably he was, for the Chief became almost visibly annoyed. We finished our tea, which was half sugar, and were shown out with little politeness.

"You must send telegram to Russian Consul in Kashgar. Go over there, my dears. The man who lost is the telegraph man. You can send in English; it will be all right. I will come there soon."

We left John with his stuff and made our way through mud-puddles to the house he had pointed out. Confucius had been lost somewhere in the shuffle; therefore we went unattended for the first time since our arrival.

The house was just another quadrangle, distinguished chiefly by the wires which led into it, and by the size of the perpetual mud-puddles in the yard. We were met at the door by a little girl, a pretty little Chinese girl with a kitten on her shoulder. She smiled shyly as we murmured "Telegraph," and showed us in, bobbing along in her long black cloak, with her sleek black hair, tight-drawn, pressing the back of the cat.

The room was quite large, and very sloppy. A stove, the sort of stove which belongs only in country stores, where the natives may gather, tell stories, and spit, was in the center of the room. A large wooden platform covered with rugs and pillows filled one side; a richly dressed woman reclined sensuously upon it, smoking. A long table stretched before the windows on the other side, holding a telegraph outfit. We glanced at it. "Chinese Imperial Telegraph, 1912." No wonder it was busted! The little girl ran up to Thin-Face, who was standing by the stove with his sleeves rolled up. He looked at us, frowned, and shouted. We stayed.

A slatternly woman entered from another room with a brass bowl and a toothbrush. The operator, Thin-Face, took a wash cloth and began to rub himself. Then he brushed his teeth.

He made a great fuss over this ceremony. It was not particularly pleasant for the spectators. The idea seemed to be to rinse his mouth and the floor at the same time. The bowl was refilled twice, while he gargled noisily, munched a bit, and then spit all over the floor. Strange to say he never spit twice in the same place. The woman watched, bored. The little girl, who seemed to be the daughter of the slatternly native woman, ran out to help her mother with the washing.

He looked at us as he prepared his opium pipe for a smoke. It took half an hour to make him understand that "Telegram Kashgar" meant that we wanted to send a telegram to Kashgar.

We wrote it out in English, as ordered by Comrade John: "Chinese refuse allow Americans traveling for Soviet pass Irkeshtam please advise Schroeder Peters." He spoke nothing but high-class Chinese, John had said. He pulled out sheets of rice paper and a fine-tipped paint-brush and began to write, laboriously. Of course we had dosed him up with a wad of money before this occurred.

"My God, Pete! He's writing in *English!* Look at that paper!"

He was. He copied our printed message in script with that absurd paint-brush. This process lasted half an hour. Then, for some unknown reason he covered a page with Chinese writing, copied it over three times, and began to read, very slowly: "Chai-neece ree-foos alloo Am-Am-Amelica" (grin) "traw-vell—ink! fa Sov-yet pac Irkeshtam plee-ace ad-viz Shro-ee-dair Pet-tairs huh?" He repeated it three times.

"You old bum!" shouted Pete. "You can talk English as well as we. What's the idea of making fools out of us?"

He only looked blank and waved us out. But we were not to be pushed away in such a hurry. We wanted to see him do more tricks. We sat down, stupefied. He knew high Chinese and yet he could read English from Chinese script and write it too! But he ignored us.

The little pipe was called into play again. Its tiny brass bowl was stuffed, a taper lighted, and he puffed several times, vigorously. His eyes looked bright and strange. He walked up and down, began to laugh. He chattered with the woman lying half asleep on the bed. He broke into a wild capering, and shouted gleefully, never paying us the slightest attention. And then he leaned over the woman, kissed her, lay down on the bed beside her—

We took a deep breath of the cool clean air of the evening, walking back toward the fort. It was a relief to get into the open. We wanted to find John. Perhaps we ought to go back to Russia with John, as long as the chance was offered. Perhaps China was not exactly the place for us.

John was gone!

A weird noise of bugles, drums, and shrill pipes came from the main courtyard of the place. We looked in. A soldier barred the gate. The other end had been decorated with red and gold paper covered with Chinese characters. A sort of platform was under the archway. The soldier didn't seem to mind us as we watched the proceedings.

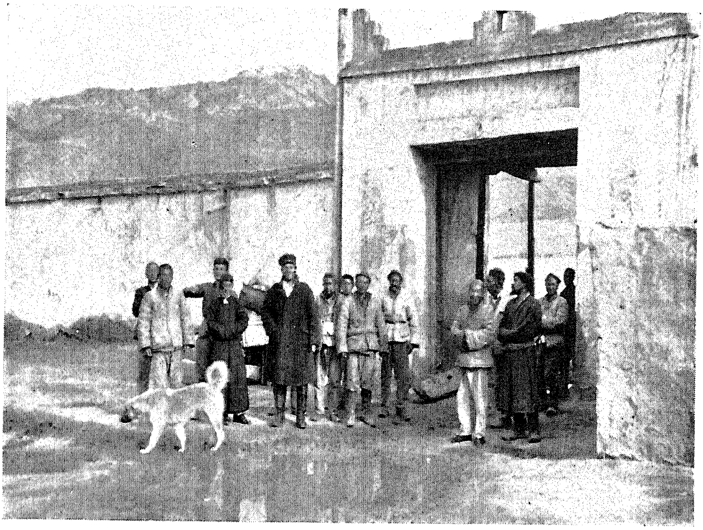
Drums beat in strange rhythms. About thirty soldiers held two ropes, which were tied to the horns of a very angry ram. Some one set off a package of fire-crackers. We saw the slim figure of the Devil, Smooth-Face, and the nice soldier standing about the platform, near some curtains at its sides. Girl-Boy brushed off imaginary flies from the Neck.

Faster and faster beat the drums. Louder and more piercing the music played. More and more fire-crackers were set off, until the whole yard was filled with smoke and crackling. The ram, kicking and plunging, was led forward. The crowd began to chant, at first low, then louder and louder. A man in long robes advanced from the curtains bearing a shining platter with a silken covering. The Devil reverently lifted the silk, drew forth a long knife. The ram was dragged to the platform, lifted upon it. The Devil in a frenzy rushed at the animal, slit its throat, jumped back. As he did so bunches of colored papers were lighted, and thrown in the air. Suddenly, silence fell. No one moved. Not a sound could be heard but the soft gurgling of the bloody ram on the altar. The meeting broke up.

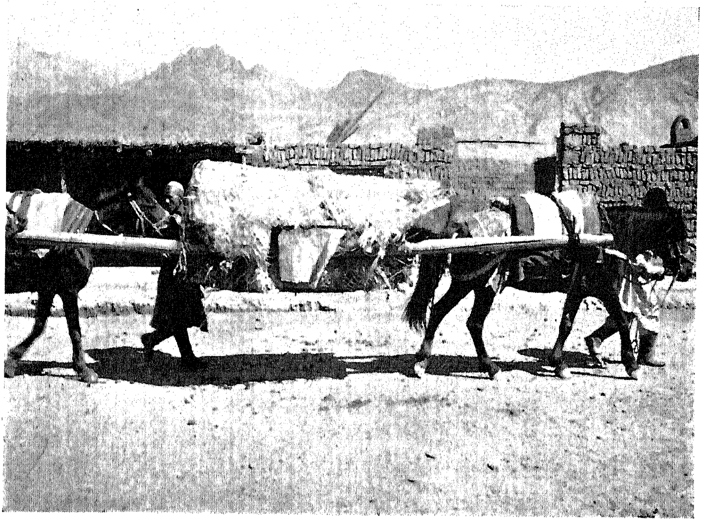
This was then the cradle of civilization. Up there on the hills were the nomad Kirghiz, pastoral, primitive, untutored, keeping one step ahead of the grass. Caravan leaders brought cotton and silk from the Orient as they had been doing for thousands of years, meeting the same dangers, living the same lives, doing the same things that their ancestors had done. This fort: there was little here to mark it as belonging to the twentieth century; nothing but four rusty guns and modern money. And now these Chinese had killed a sheep and called it religion! "I wonder what they do with the meat," said Pete, wistfully.

In our caravanserai was an old man, withered, weak, with not an ounce of flesh on his bones. They had brought him in a litter, a sort of stretcher borne between two horses, and covered from the sun by a wicker roof. He was dying; there was no doubt about that. In spite of the fact that our clinic had closed for lack of business after the balanchok episode, we were called upon for aid. We could do nothing but advise that he be taken to a doctor in Kashgar as soon as possible. He had dysentery, amœbic dysentery in an advanced stage, and there was nothing to be done. Harry looked at Pete in a discouraged way. "That's what Asia does to you." The next morning the man was dead, and they packed him in the litter and drove off.

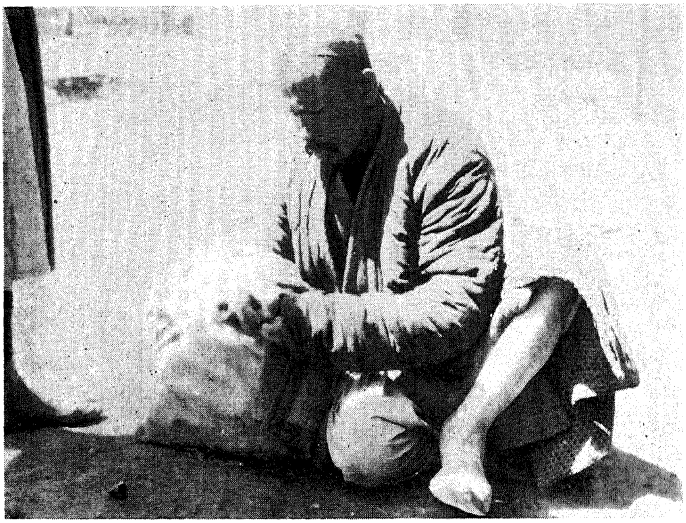
The next day we returned after a long walk down to the red river with Confucius, for we still retained enough civilization to wash at least once a week. The hut was filled with Chinese, and Smooth-Face was pawing over the baggage, messing it up generally. He looked at the gun, and shook his head. "No permit." No permit? We had dozens of them. We produced our Yale letters with the big blue seal, our tailor bills, our candy-store labels. Harry played the trump card by bringing out an old seaman's passport for the Argentine, covered with fingerprints and pictures and stamps, while we both showed our seamen's discharge papers. No, they would take the gun. Harry seized it, cocked it (empty) and waved it



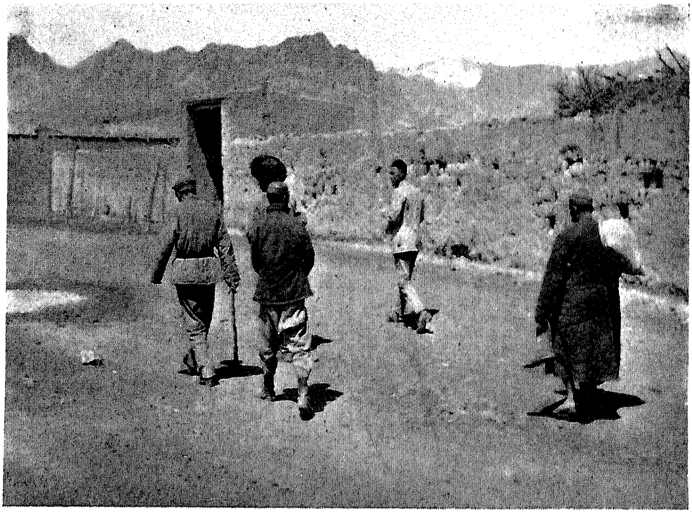
The Guardians of the Fort. (Girl-Boy between Harry and John.)



"They packed him in a litter and drove off."



"The ankle was bent in a right angle."



"He hopped a few steps."

furiously. He lost his temper and raged. He pointed it at the Chinese, who turned and fled. Smooth-Face leered as he walked out, slowly, very, very slowly. "Postlizaftra!"

Harry kept the gun near him after that, although Confucius at first kicked a bit. But we were glad to have the gun when we walked abroad that afternoon. We heard the sounds of thuds, and cries, and weeping.

Outside in the street three men were sitting on the ground, with packs open before them. Four soldiers stood around, watching. One of the men, an Uzbek, was waving papers and pleading, as the soldiers kicked him. The natives were apparently small merchants traveling to Kashgar; in their packs were large colored handkerchiefs, skullcaps, and a few silks. We looked for a moment, pitied him whose papers were bad and walked on around the fort, Confucius, the faithful dog, trotting along at our heels.

"Good Lord!" Pete exclaimed. "Do you see this stream, this water that we have been drinking? Do you see where it goes?" It went through the fort. The water that we had used came from a sewer!

A sharp cry burst from the direction of the hut. We ran back. The Uzbek who had been having the argument was sitting in the midst of the soldiers, yelling and holding his leg. He had his shoe off, and was pulling the sock. The ankle was bent in a right angle and a piece of bone protruded. Two of the soldiers stood near with huge clubs in their hands; a third raised a wicked-looking whip. Confucius seized us as we tried to rush forward, and held us back. The blow descended, and the creature screamed as the lash slid off his face on to the broken leg.

He was whipped and prodded into a standing position, whimpering and crying. He hopped a few steps, and fell again as the whip thudded across his face. A red welt swelled out on the brown, glistening skin.

The soldiers picked him up, roughly, and carried him off. He looked back, and upon his face was such a look of agony, of terror that we felt strangely sick. We glanced at the ground. Blood and tears had mingled in little dust-covered droplets where he had been sitting.

"Documenti polohoit," said an expressionless bystander. His papers were bad. And so were ours!

"Pete," said Harry seriously, "I vote that to-morrow we go one way or the other. If they won't let us go to Kashgar we will go to Osh. We haven't any horses, anyway, and although we can probably hitch on to a caravan to Kashgar—"

"I'm all for it. We can't spend all summer here. We have to get home sometime."

We both were thinking, not of our limited time, not of the possibility of Kashgar, but of the look on the face of that poor unfortunate native who had been carried off by those soldiers.

But the next day we awoke with the mud and water falling down our necks from the roof. Pete was the first to notice any change. "Look. Confucius has a mate. There are two of them now."

Two soldiers, not one, sat by the door. The new one was even more dumb and more cruel-looking than our little friend. We dressed, had breakfast of eggs as usual, and started to saunter out for a little fresh air and rain. The new Confucius barred the door, growling. We were to be kept in.

That day was not much fun. It slowly dawned upon us that escape was becoming more and more a necessity. Kashgar was forgotten at once. Freedom was what we needed. The situation grew worse when Smooth-Face came in to see us. He held in his hand some money and a paper. He gave them over. It was our telegram, the one thin thread to which we had been clinging. If the Consul knew we were there some hope was left. But the message had never been sent. Smooth-Face glided out with a muttered "Zaftra." There was an unusual amount of emphasis upon the familiar word. It was pregnant with meaning. We shuddered. And we began to plan.

Confucius and his friend apparently took turns guarding us. The familiar dog had the day watch, the new one the night. It was Confucius who watched us all that day. And we knew Confucius' weakness. We gave him some money and he let us walk about the yard. But no further. We could not venture toward the gate without hearing a growl from him. And when he saw an official or a soldier coming, he packed us back into the hut as fast as he could, grunting in a frightened way.

We approached the "pair-o'-woodchuck," the interpreter. *He* would be our friend. But he disregarded us completely. He must have remembered our unfulfilled promise.

We turned frantically to the old man with the trachoma, and asked his help. When he understood the situation, he sympathized, and promised to do something.

Horses were what we wanted, two horses, or three if possible. He could only promise, and shake his head.

The day was long and full of torment. The uncertainty of the thing was wearing. If we had known definitely whether we were to be tortured or set free we might have felt some relief. But relief was not for us. It is the way the Chinese do things.

With horses we could certainly escape from that place. We had two hundred and forty rounds of thirty-caliber, high-power cartridges, and a good gun. The Chinese had perhaps six old-fashioned rusty rifles, those which hung on the wall at the gate. We waited, trusting in the old man whom we had treated, and who was now our only friend.

But if we did get back to Russia could we enter? We had no visa to return; we had left that to chance and a benevolent Consul in Kashgar. We were sure that Ivan would let us stay with him, but he could not give us permission to go back to Osh. In other words, perhaps we should have to spend the rest of our lives in the narrow strip of land between China and Russia. The prospect was not pleasant. But the first thing to do was to get away from these bandits.

We went to sleep that night, feeling very lonely, very insignificant beside the vast powers of the largest continent, which we had so boldly and casually attempted to conquer. We were whipped, and we admitted it, although we were not sure that the whipping would cease at a mere inability to proceed on our way. The look on that man's face as they took him off—

It was done very carefully, and very craftily the next morning. The day was beautiful, sunlit, and with a clear sky. "Just the day for an escape," murmured Harry; but our hearts were heavy, and our stomachs felt empty.

Confucius was on guard, as his friend had disappeared. Harry sauntered out into the yard, whistling. The old man, our one friend, was in his hut. Harry stopped to chat with him. Confucius watched.

Yes, there were horses. But money—the old man had given some to the owner. Harry casually dropped his handkerchief on the old man's floor, and left a few rubles in its place. After a short while, the old man went away.

"God!" said Harry. "If he doesn't come back, we're in the soup. But we have to trust him. Now let's attend to our old friend here with the gun."

Pete beckoned to Confucius. "Come here, you dog, and have some medicine. It's good for you." He held up a bottle of cognac. Confucius' eye lightened, even if it was before breakfast. Then he shook his head. Our hearts dropped.

"You sick?" Pete rubbed his stomach. The soldier nodded. "Well, then, here's the stuff for you." The man came in, sat down; we poured him out a stiff drink in a cup. He took it, tasted it, and smiled—if a Chinese soldier can smile. He held it out for more.

"If these Chinese can hold more than we can, we're out of luck. One bottle of this stuff would do for me, and one bottle is all we have. We'll have to give it to him fast so that it will work better." Pete held out the bottle. Confucius seized it, and began to drink.

Our stuff was already prepared for a quick get-away. We had done that during the night. The only thing now was to wait for our guard to get drunk, to hope and pray that no official would arrive while he was in that condition, to hope that no one in the yard cared much what we did, and to put our trust in the old man who had gone, we supposed, after the horses.

Confucius had that bottle down behind his filthy overlarge coat in no time. He sat down on the floor and grinned contentedly. We saw our one friend come into the yard, and sit in the door of his hut. Confucius dropped his gun. Poor lad, he apparently had had no breakfast.

Three horses came into the yard, led by a Kirghiz boy in a fuzzy hat. They waited. Confucius' eyelids began to get heavy. He swayed slightly on his heels. "I think it's all right now, Pete, old man. Now if we don't make it—Oh, hell! We'll make it. But if you get through and I don't, give my best regards to Katy, and tell her I still love her."

"Shut up, and get to work. Take that gun—it's all loaded, isn't it?—and stand by the gate. The cartridges are in your pocket? I'll load up, we'll walk out, and make it casual."

Confucius just didn't know what it was all about. He could not have seen us march forth from our hut with our baggage; if he did, he made no sign. He could not have watched Harry standing silently by the gate in case of emergency; he surely did not notice that Pete and the boy were loading the horses. It did not take long. Pete went back into the hut, as there seemed to be plenty of time, and found the old dog getting very sick on the floor of the kibitka.

We mounted, casually, although we were quite frightened. The natives about the caravanserai couldn't have known that we were under arrest, for they took little notice. We said good-by to the "pair-o'-woodchuck" and made him a handsome present to keep his mouth shut, for he was the only person there besides Confucius in any way connected with the Chinese. We said good-by to the old man, gave him a cigarette lighter, and plodded slowly through the gate.

Harry rode in front with the gun naked and cocked, his pockets full of ammunition. The boy came next on the pack horse, and Pete held the rear. We passed a quadrangle, then the telegraph operator's house. The little girl waved to us from the doorway, and stood there watching. We prayed that she would not call her father.

The street was deserted, as usual in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. We drew near the fort. Here was the crucial point. If they saw us now!

They did see us. A soldier ran out of the sentry box as we came near, and held up his hand. Very carefully we did not draw rein until we had passed that gaping, dangerous gate into the fort. We pulled up behind the fort, on the very edge of the plain and freedom. By some lucky chance the soldier thought that he could attend to us himself, and failed to give any alarm. If he had called anyone to his aid, we should have had to run, and old Kirghiz horses do not make good runners.

We edged away, trying to lead the fellow into the plain. He followed us, chattering, for about a hundred yards. We chattered back at him. And then he looked around. As he looked, Pete leaned over, gave the pack horse a terrific wallop, we beat our own steeds, and were away.

By the time the soldier had run back to the fort and awakened some of his comrades, we were well out on the plain toward Irkeshtam, Russia and friends.

We looked back. A crowd of soldiers was at the gate of the fort, staring. They made no move in our direction. A man stepped forth, looked, and turned away. It was Smooth-Face. But apparently they could give no chase for they had no horses.

"God, I'd like to put a shot into that mob," said Harry, clenching his teeth.

"Oh, come on. Be yourself. We may want to come back."

Come back? It was true. Somehow we felt that we hadn't done with Asia yet. If those Chinese were so dumb as to let us get away—Harry laughed, loudly and endlessly. Pete saw the joke, and he laughed. We came to the little hill above Irkeshtam, still laughing. The Kirghiz boy looked startled. But he looked even more surprised when we dismounted, shook hands, threw some dust into the air, and faced the east. But he would have been astonished if he had understood what we were saying. We were very solemnly swearing that some day we would come back and reach Kashgar; that our lives would be barren without the fulfillment of our first, perhaps foolish, aim.

It is hard for the Westerner, accustomed as he is to his subways and his steam heat, to realize the hold which Asia can get on the minds of men, once they have tasted the lure of her cities, her deserts, her topless hills and snow-bound valleys. We knew what our families, those ogres of common sense, would say; we foresaw the plain, strong pull of reason with which they would try to influence us. "You have had your adventure. You have wandered as you would. We have given you your freedom of choice. Now you must settle down, work hard, raise a family, and learn to be good citizens." But we also knew that Asia's insidious, sensuous allure was stronger than all the reason in the world, and we knew that we would come back, back to the open desert and the snows, back to the age-old cities, when civilization and all its boredom had begun to wear and torment our souls. We never felt that call, the call of this vast continent, so strongly as then, when we were setting our faces westward for the first time, with Asia slowly slipping from our grasp.

Down in the village Ivan came running out, grinning broadly. We told him rather breathlessly what had happened. He had heard some of the details from John, who had gone a few days before. His broad pleasant face grew serious. We fully expected him to say, "I told you so." How good he looked there, in the red and khaki uniform of a white man!

"Oh," he said with a smile, "I forgot to tell you that the Chinese of Sinkiang had a revolution just two days before you arrived there. Their governor, the man to whom you had the letter, was shot, and his assassin is in power. It's too bad you showed them that letter."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I KASHGAR?

> "Kokand, Andizhan, O-o-osh,
> I-i-i-i Kashgar!"
> *Fragment of ancient but well-known Chinese victory song*

ROBERT BROWNING once remarked that "The low man goes on adding one to one, his hundred's soon hit: this high man, aiming at a million, misses an unit." "Yes," comment professors of English. "This passage illustrates Browning's doctrine of success through failure."

Let the "high man" rationalize himself away from reason, let him repeat to himself that he has almost achieved the impossible, let him thrill with pride at the loftiness of his aim; the so-called "low man" can still look down upon him scornfully, saying, "I succeeded."

We were filled with a keen sense of having failed, as we faced Ivan and his comrades that day. We had set out one rainy afternoon not so long before full of the highest hopes; we had come back minus our horses and our guide, a large part of our money, and all of our confidence. It would not be easy to pass off failure to our friends when we came home. "Well, did you make it?" "Er—uh—that is, we got into a Chinese revolution on the border, and had to turn back. No, we never got into China at all." We hoped that our female friends would be so excited by the word "revolution" that they would forget to notice the evident failure. And it so happened. "Revolution? How thrilling! Weren't you frightened?"

Even the phlegmatic Ivan was inclined to look at it seriously. He called us into his office, and fired questions of all kinds at us, meanwhile writing furiously on important-looking papers. When he had finished, we were told to sign a pretentious document. "What's it for?"

"It's a protocol," Ivan shrugged his shoulders. The word sounded high, related somehow with ultimatum, treaty, pact, or even note. "It will be sent to Moscow." The Expedition was getting important in the eyes of the world. Webster says that a protocol is a "preliminary memorandum, often signed by the negotiators, as a basis for a final convention or treaty." That took some of the sting from defeat. "The Peers and Fathers of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics demand an explanation of the conduct of the Republic of China toward the Schroeder-Peters Central Asiatic Expedition-for-the-Collection-of-Grain-in-Chinese-Turkestan, and herewith send Their Forty-Eight-Hour Ultimatum."

Ivan had the thing signed by everybody at the fort except the wives. After that it probably found its way into the waste-paper basket. He did admit that it might be useful in case some Chinese were accidentally mistreated by the Russians; it would serve as an effective come-back to all Chinese protests.

"How about us getting back home?"

"I can do nothing about that. We will telegraph to Moscow, and you must wait here until they give you permission. If they do not, you must stay here, for you cannot enter Russia and you cannot enter China." Ivan laughed heartily at his little joke. It was a funny joke. Gorby was in the Pamirs for three months, and we had no other pull. Pete sighed, and bewailed the fact that Confucius had finished off the last of the cognac.

Ivan took us out in the court, and discovered a croquet game in full swing. "Ha! Russia will play America." We held back. We were rotten croquet players. And the inferences which a game of this sort would have did not appeal to us. But we were forced into it by the smiling Ivan, forced to uphold the cause of Capitalism, Industrialism, and a bunch of other isms with croquet. The court was like the streets of Boston. Communism had the advantage of the home field, and Capitalism made a poor showing under the handicap. Excitement became intense as the game progressed. The bleachers, which filled at once, were prejudiced. The U.S. had no supporters in the crowd. The American team made a sally in the second chukker, and the one-sided mob groaned. At last it was over. Communism had triumphed. Another victory for the Truth! "Hell!" said Harry. "We're no Capitalists anyway."

Communism was not content with a croquet victory. Nor did Capitalism remain silent long. The evening degenerated into a philosophical discussion of ideals in very bad French, and when our questions became too complex for Ivan, the commissar of politics was drafted into service. He was bored with the whole proceedings very soon, and somehow the talk swung around to America and armies. Harry remarked on the size of their force.

"How large is your standing army?"

We didn't know. "Oh, about a hundred thousand."

"I've got it," said Ivan, thumbing a pamphlet. "Here, on July 1, 1927, you had 153,613 men as regulars! Your reserve is estimated at four hundred thousand—I have not the exact figures, but I can get them."

We were aghast. If a little subcommandant in a border post a hundred miles from nowhere knew that much, what did Moscow know?

"We have about five hundred thousand," Ivan went on, "which is less than half of the regular army of the Czar. And we are surrounded by envious nations ready to pounce upon us at any moment. England in India, Japan in China, Poland—all hands are against us, who want only peace. I just read in our paper that Poland was opening fire at our border."

Harry tried to convince. "The trouble with you is that you preach revolution, red revolution. To us the word has an evil sound, bringing war, and bloodshed, and murder. When you say revolution, we think of the skies darkened with smoke from burning cities, of women outraged, of innocent citizens fleeing before a force bent only on destruction."

"Revolution," said Ivan, "is constructive. We destroy the evil in the social system—that is true. But we build a new system on the ruins of the old. To us, Revolution means peace and above all freedom from the bondage of outworn superstitions and prejudices, the enemies of mankind. Revolution is deliverance."

Harry grunted. "You ought to use another word."

We spent a week with Ivan, and every night the men gathered over pipes to argue, while the women cooked schnitzel and tea in preparation for the inevitable friendly feast which followed. It was great fun, this business of matching hard cold American wits against fiery, idealistic, Slavic ones. Often, too often for comfort, Lenin was quoted, Lenin in lithograph looking serenely down at his disciples from the wall. "Our Father Lenin says"—that ended the discussion.

The walls of the "Argument Room," by day the kitchen-dining-room-parlor of the commissar of politics, was covered with posters. They advertised the new Volga-Don canal, connecting the Caspian with the Black Sea, they showed a rogues' gallery of the leading men of Russia, of the Kirghiz Socialist Soviet Republic, and they boomed the advance of civilization. Some of these reminded us of advertisements for Mellon's Food, or Herpicide. A lean, gaunt man stood before a plow. The horse was drooping, the ground was barren, even the landscape was splotched and uneven. His wife agonizedly held her child before him, praying for bread, but he only gazed glumly at her. On the other side, offsetting this lurid scene, was a broad field, even, well-kept, covered with waving yellow grain. A group of happy farmers, well-fed, fat, healthy, clustered about a shiny new tractor. If we could have read the Kirghiz inscription, we should have probably found: "Before—and after! Communism will save it. Use Communism for happiness!"

Communism and the good hearts of our friends the Russians saved us. They provided us with a place to sleep (the floor of the room where the "ploff parties" were held, shared with two other natives), they gave us food (the inevitable afternoon ploff, with tea and bread the rest of the day), and they finally loosened up sufficiently to allow permission for us to return to Osh and slip through the red tape. Ivan apprised us of this last fact in casual conversation one morning.

"You are free to go to Osh, but no further. You can take any caravan you see, and I will arrange it. Here are some camels coming now."

Long lines of laden beasts slithered gently toward us over the red gravel of the river-bed, making for the huge yard where was piled merchandise awaiting transit to China.

We sat on a pile of bales and watched them come, shuffling slowly up the slight rise from the river. A little gray donkey trotted placidly at the head of each line; to his saddle was tied a hair rope leading to the nose of the first camel. The solemn old Uzbek sat stiffly on the donkey, his legs in their high boots stretched forward to miss the ground. With one hand he jabbed at the donkey's back with a sharp stick through a hole in the pack saddle in front of him. The camels followed, the nose of each tied to the saddle of the one before. Every curve in the trail, every slip of the donkey, was repeated again and again as the line moved on, to lose itself at last in the young calf at the end, who matched with unequal stride the swinging steps of his mother before him.

The lead camel marched proudly, long neck stretched curvingly upward, the red pompon on his head wobbling slightly as his heavily loaded body swayed. The bell on his neck clanked with every step, drowning out the shuffle of his huge flat feet as they flapped awkwardly. He looked straight before him, head haughty, lips sneer-ing insultingly, eyes far over the dirty brown man who jabbed unceasingly at the back of the little bobbing donkey.

The enclosure was packed with scurrying men; camels standing in long patient lines, their eyes set in a wise, arrogant stare; little scattered donkeys gazing foolishly at the ground, their long ears flapping apathetically at flies; huge bales flung where they had fallen. Strange shouts mingled with the shrill, sharp whinny of the beasts, with the clank of cow-bells, with the thud of falling bales. As a little brown man tugged at a rope, crooning softly, the camel would shift the heavy square load on his back, swaying awkwardly, and kneel, bending long crooked hind legs first, and following with a sudden clump upon the calloused front knees. Quickly his load was loosed, and he would rise slowly, shaking his relieved back, and wait until his whole row could be led off.

The men worked feverishly, untying knots, swinging the four square loads from low backs, and coiling the long hair ropes. Checkers with papers marked off the numbers on the bales, swearing in three languages. Camels were kicked to a standing position, baring wicked rows of yellow teeth and shrieking. Ropes caught in the soft mass of tangled brown curls on the necks, and flicked away bits of straw and shavings as they were shaken free. A strong odor filled the warm air. A cloud of dust began to rise, blending the swaying, heaving mass into a riot of vague motion and confusion, obscuring the dark red of the tassels, turning the white peaked hats of the men into dull yellow. Over at one side, on the edge of the mass, four dirty natives squatted solemnly sipping tea, while Ivan talked to them earnestly.

Ivan threaded his way through the confusion, and came up to us. "You can go with one of these caravans, if you wish. They take ten days to reach Osh."

"Ten days to Osh? Ten days on one of those things? Not for us!"

We swelled our chests with pride as we refused to go with them, preferring to wait for horses. After all, it was something to be conceited about—refusing a trip on a camel. It gave us a feeling of having traveled a bit ourselves. We had heard them, you have heard them, those ultrafashionable folk who have just returned from a Cook's tour of the Orient. "And think of it, my dear! We rode on a camel! Across the desert sands! Just imagine! Yes, here I am and here is Aunt Minnie. See the picture of us on camels, Junior?" Oh, yes, we felt seasoned globe-trotters.

We had not long to wait. The next day ushered in Comrade Samaat with twenty horses. Twenty of them! With no more than a hurried handshake to Ivan and a wave to Aleck we were off, off with four men to attend to our conversational wants and a whole covey of good pack horses to bear us. It seemed at first that some great Pair-o'-woodchuck must have provided them in return for services rendered. We threw our chests out and surveyed our caravan as it crossed the wide red river-bed into the rugged mountains. As we entered the hills, we looked back across the flat to the little cluster of tumble-down huts.

Pete spoke first. "Next summer."

"Can't," Harry's voice was sad.

"It's bigger than us. We can't help coming. Families, wives, professions won't mean a thing when we hear it calling."

"I know. We'll be fizzles in the eyes of the world, we'll be branded as rolling stones who never will amount to a row of beans. I'm sort of sorry I tasted it."

"We might have spent our lives as humdrum 'good citizens' if we hadn't. We could have enjoyed the bliss of ignorance, raised a family, and never known. But that's closed to us now."

"Listen, Pete. Why don't you chuck the law? You know it's hopeless. My medicine will help me in this, but law won't do you a bit of good. Take up anthropology, or something useful. Your life is cut out for you and you can't help it."

"Well, we'll think about that when we get home. And we might as well get home as fast as possible. We've got to make better arrangements to get through those Chinese."

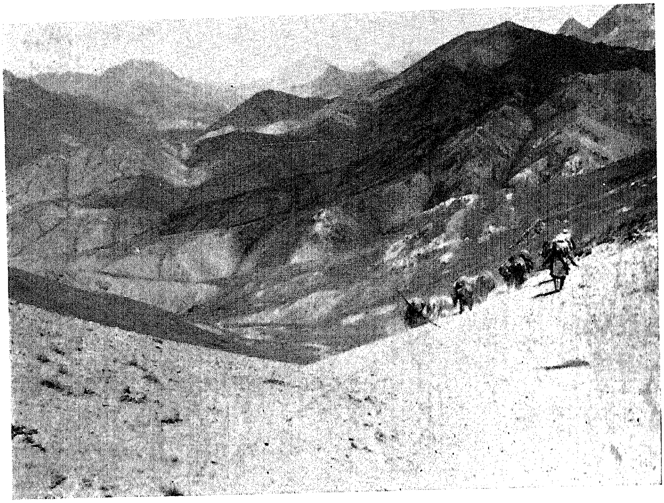
"Yeah, next time—"

The caravan jogged along steadily. It was not long before some of the minor disadvantages of Asiatic travel began to manifest themselves. Riding a pack saddle is not as easy as it sounds. Unfortunately we were not so constructed by nature as to sit in comfort straddling the hard wide expanse under us. When a stop was called in the middle of the afternoon, for no apparent reason, it took a bit of mauling to get our legs straight again.

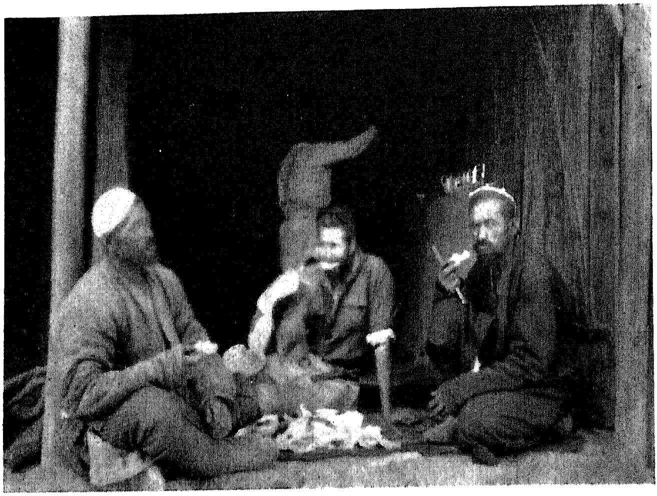
Samaat and his gang were a jolly crew, totally different from the Prophet and the despicable Khan. To

"Long lines of laden beasts slithered . . . over the red gravel." (*Page* 287)

"Samaat and his gang were a jolly crew." (*Page* 290)



"Like some vast sea tossed into disorder by a storm."



"Sugar candy, melons, and soft bread." (*Page* 294)

Gen we were always "Sahib" (except in China), but to four citizens we were "Comrade." The change invoked taking orders and getting much more food, luxury in the form of a tent, and interest. The food was welcome and worth the interest.

Onion soup was served at once. A few handfuls of chopped onion, a pepper or two, a large pot of water, and it was done. The bread was scraped free of mould, broken on a rock, soaked in the water, and eaten. What mould escaped only helped to season the mess.

After the soup we were sitting around when the assistant head man pointed to the top of a mountain and then at our gun. We looked with the glasses. A goat! At last we could do some hunting. We had come to hunt and here was our chance. We looked up the word for goat, and they agreed, smiling. Stifling our excitment, we set off with the head man, on a long tramp around the hill.

The goat was nearer now. It pawed the ground, dashing its huge horns, and then standing motionless to gaze over the valley. We climbed, panting. Perhaps it was an Ovis Poli, one of those big-horned sheep which Marco had reported and which had been believed extinct for years. We pushed ahead. Suddenly as we looked our goat spread its wings and flew up the valley.

The native grinned and flapped his arms. "Alai, alai."

"Damn you! I bet you knew it was an eagle all the time."

From the top of the hill a vast panoramic maze of hills and deep valleys stretched in all directions to the distance. Like some sea tossed into disorder by a storm the green land spread away in huge jagged waves and rolling troughs, until the whole blended into an uneven horizon. To the south the glittering snows rose high above the waves like a line of cold, unmoving icebergs. It was as if we were cast in some tiny boat to the crest, able to glimpse for one brief moment the raging of the storm before the inevitable plunge into the hollow. We slid down the hill, crushing myriads of wild flowers which sprinkled the green valley.

The boys were building a ploff back at the tent. It was quite a ritual. The big shallow iron pot was heated, as everyone blew into the fire. One comrade cut the fat from the overhanging rump of native sheep into little cubes, and fried it until the grease was all extracted. The hard remnants were raked out, and passed around. "Uzbek Horse Doors," said Pete.

Another comrade took charge. He put into the sizzling grease chunks of mutton, horse, or what have you. When this was partly cooked, the pot was half filled with water, heated, and an amount of washed rice equal to the capacity of six hungry mouths dumped in on top. Of course potatoes, tomatoes, onions, carrots, beans, and even grass could be put in after the meat, if available.

Samaat, in his capacity as Chief Cook, patted the rice down, having enough so that it made a solid mass. An inverted plate, which did not quite cover the pot, was placed directly on top of the rice, and the whole business left to steam. There was no time limit to the cooking. When everyone was ready for dinner it was done. Samaat scooped and mixed and shoveled until meat, fat, grass, and rice were blended into the delicious combination known as ploff, which needs nothing more than the bare hands to eat. Samaat being religious, a lengthy grace was said before and after meals, thanking Allah for personally overseeing the cooking.

After supper the whole bunch gathered in a circle, squatting on a rug. Pete burst into a horse laugh. "It's craps. They're rolling the bones!"

They had four bones, resembling horse teeth, which they rolled on the ground. We tried to figure it out. Apparently the man who made most teeth stand on end was the winner. Money changed hands rapidly. They made room for us to sit down. "Nothing doing," said Harry. "I'm not going to be made a sucker in this night club. The teeth are probably loaded."

They smiled and offered us some of that green naas which the Khan used so much. Pete broke up the game by taking a pinch and putting it under his tongue according to the directions. He was carefully watched.

Suddenly he jumped up and began spitting violently. "My knees feel funny as hell. It's creeping up on me. Damn it, I'm getting woozy." The caravan men laughed and tossed in handfuls of the stuff.

"Serves you right for taking drugs."

Pete was dopy all night.

We had a good time with the boys, and an easy trip back to Osh. Old Terek, whom we had beaten in one of his most intractable moods, offered us a smiling face and a cloudless sky as we passed over his furrowed brow one morning. We tramped gayly up his brothers. We felt lightened in mind and body, for we knew what was before us.

Passing a yurt one day, we were met by a waving Kirghiz woman who practically forced us to dismount and enter. There was old Grandma, whom we had treated so long before for so many ailments. But she was a different grandma, a grinning grandma, tickled to death to see us. She pointed to her throat, her teeth, her stomach, and laughed "Yakshi!" She unwrapped her leg, once covered with dreadful sores, and showed us clean scars, almost healed from the soap treatment we had ordered. She made us stay for lunch, and treated us to lots of milk and kumys, chuckling and giggling every few minutes as she showed us the results of our somewhat hasty pill-dispensing. And there are those who do not believe in faith healing!

Since the horses had to be fed so often we persuaded Samaat to push on ahead of the rest with us, which he seemed willing to do. We left the caravan with three horses, a donkey, and old Samaat, all of whom were nominally comrades. The caravan-bashi never failed to produce food when wanted, and even surprised us with occasional extras like sugar candy, melons, and soft bread. Again we cursed the Khan.

As Osh drew nearer and nearer failure stared us in the face. Osh was a second home to us. How could we meet George? And if George was hard to meet, what would those in our own land think of us? We had gone forth, confident; we should return with our tails between our legs. What would Gorby say? We trotted on, thinking up excuses. And then we began to take heart. Our entrance, hollow as it was, came to look like a triumphal procession. People joined us. We rode up to the Sovtorgflot ahead of six horses, two large-wheeled wagons, ten assorted camels, and a drove of donkeys. The prodigal sons had come home to roost.

George came rushing out, preceded by his grin. "Well, well! Back again? To tell the truth, I never expected to see you alive."

Had we made a fizzle of the whole business?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MONKS FROM SIBERIA

"There was a young monk from Siberia,
Whose life grew wearier and weria,
He leapt from his cell
Gave a hell of a yell,
And eloped with the Mother Superia."

Holy Roller Hymnal

HARRY pensively tasted his tea and jam. He seemed to be playing with a thought. Then he spoke. "You know, Pete, I think we might as well start for home. I've got to get to college, and you have to make law school before very long."

"Yes, I was thinking the same thing myself."

"Well, let's go east. It's just as short that way as around by Europe. Get out the map and find out how we go."

Pete ran his finger across the map of the world. "I think there is a railroad running northwest from Andijan to the Trans-Siberian. We can take that to Japan. It has the advantage of being cheap, too."

Harry sighed. "We'll have to change the old song. Something like this; only with a mournful tune:

"Andijan, Oosasky, Tashkent;
The Aral, Samara, Chelyabinsk;
Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk;
Manchouli, Harbin, and Mukden;

Fusan, Kyoto, Tokyo,
Yokohama—and—
Home."

"It doesn't have to be so mournful. I know several people who have never been around the world."

The Soviet Union was not so sure that we could leave. We were in Osh, and we could stay there, but the chances of getting out seemed slim at first. We tried to see our friend the commandant, but he was always busy, so busy that it looked as if he were avoiding us. Finally Luba, the Muscovite maiden, took charge.

"I know these Communists. Every citizen has a right to appeal to any of them at any moment. If I should want, I can demand to see Kalinin, our president, and see him. Let me go."

She took us to the Tammany Hall of Osh, broke up an important meeting of the Party, and dragged the commandant away smiling. He gave permission at once to go to Andijan. That was a step toward home.

George collected a dozen friends and gave us a farewell dinner, movie, beer, and night-club party. Shorty was there, paying a lot of attention to a fat blonde beauty from Leningrad. She failed to reciprocate to his advances, so Shorty became gloomily drunk. Instead, she began to make overtures to Harry, and then to Pete.

She was going down to Irkeshtam, she told us, to visit her husband. We pricked up our ears. Husband? What was his name? Sergius Alexis! She was Aleck's wife, the wife whose picture he had showed us, the wife who sang in the opera of Leningrad, the mother of his two boys. She certainly did not act very married toward us; we purposely failed to understand her advances and invitations, made openly and loudly to us before the whole table. When she went off with Al, George's deep-voiced friend, Mrs. George seized our dictionary, found two words, and pointed with a frown: Disgraceful modern.

Shorty came home swearing.

George gave us another dinner before we took the bus for Andijan, and presented us with letters to friends of his in Andijan and Tashkent, in which he mentioned casually that we were friends of the Great Gorbunoff, Tsa E. K. We left him grinning over six bottles of cognac, a cigarette lighter, a flashlight, and a dented metal flask.

Those letters were what saved us in the end. Friends of Gorby's are among the socially elect. The leader of the Party of Andijan gave us permission to go to Tashkent, entertained us royally, took charge of us for a whole day, bought our tickets, and had us interviewed by the newspapers. He also wrote out a warrant for the despicable Khan, and promised to have him arrested and our money recovered if possible.

The same thing happened in Tashkent. The Sovtorgflot arranged everything, fed and housed us, bought tickets all the way to Manchouli (for the insignificant sum of thirty dollars), and procured a visa to go out of Russia. Thirty dollars is not so much for a trip of over six thousand miles.

In Tashkent we were eating matzoni and cream when a hand fell on Pete's shoulder and a hearty voice said, "Ah, my dearest, dear friends. When I saw you before, you were fighting Chinese." It was John Orloff, who had come through Sim-khana when we were in the worst of the mess, but a different John, a shaven, clean, hair-cut John. He, too, showed us the sights of Tashkent.

Last of all we ran into Luba's aunt, the wife of a Jewish dentist. She had lived in Philadelphia eighteen years before. And Luba's aunt had a beautiful daughter.

"Next summer," said Pete, as we began a ten-day trip on a third-class car to Omsk, "we'll have to stop for a while in Tashkent."

A Kirghiz family occupied the shelves opposite ours for the first night. Then Lewis and Clark took them.

Lewis and Clark were two young Uzbek-speaking Russians whose lives were spent trying to keep the window closed. As we shared that window we wanted it open. The moment our backs were turned, Lewis (or Clark) inevitably closed it.

"Listen, Lewis," said Harry one day. "I have always been told that Russians were strong. They swell out their chests and march proudly into the snows. But I don't believe it. Now I know that only Americans are strong." Even that didn't keep the window open.

The car soon turned into a delightful club. Everyone knew everyone else, as forty people will when they all use the same wash-room. We taught them how to shoot craps, and how to play Russian bank (which was totally unknown), and they showed us a simple Russian euchre.

For the first few days the train passed through flat, yellow desert, the Kirghiz steppes, covered by clumps of shrubs and sage. In the far distance was a line of blue hills, running parallel to our way. After the Aral Sea had gone by (at night), we crossed a river, the Ural, into

Europe. In a few minutes the scene changed from the steppes to fertile farm land, where fields of grain stretched as far as the eye could reach. The air became cool with the tang of early autumn. Little clusters of frame houses with thatched roofs were scattered through the waving fields, surrounded by clumps of trees.

Instead of reaching Samara the car was put off at Kinel, a junction. There was no town to speak of, but crowds of people thronged the station, clean, healthy-looking people. The young women especially seemed strong with the strength of outdoors. Everyone was happy, even the filthy strays who mischievously begged and stole their living from passengers.

Once more we turned eastward. Apples appeared for the first time, and grapes, which had sold for two cents a pound in the south, became too expensive a luxury for our bank rolls.

We managed to stir up seeds of discontent against the System. On the end of our train was a private car, what they called a "slucishi vagonne." We learned that officials and Gay-Pay-Oo used it exclusively. "This is a free country where everyone is equal," we said. "How come they get a private car when their comrades have to sleep on a shelf?" No one answered.

The road plunged through the Urals toward Omsk, and the country was piled high with beautiful green mountains and dashing streams. Suddenly around a bend of a mountain, where nothing but trees had been before, a huge mining town would appear. Forests of chimneys, long rows of sheds, machinery, smoke, the clank of the mills, would fill a valley near the track. As suddenly the train would plunge around another mountain into the wilds of nature.

Out of the mountains the flat plains of farm land came again. Tiny groups of rustic houses, built of rough-hewn logs and thatched with straw, surrounded the grass-grown streets of the villages. One needs only a look at a Siberian village to understand the Russian peasant!

We stopped for a day at Chelyabinsk. It was all rather gloomy. The streets were wide and cheerless, the houses small and flimsy. The cold in the air, the wide, scattered town, the frame houses, and the atmosphere about it all made a distinct impression on us. There was nothing definite as the cause of this impression; we could not help feeling it. Somehow it was as if one were looking at a summer resort, an amusement park, or the sea, in the dead of winter. It was not especially cold, but one *felt* that in this place belonged deep snow, and piercing cold, and it seemed unnatural and bare without the winter. One missed the snow which went with the environment without knowing why one missed it.

Lewis and Clark left us at Petropavlovsk, and left behind a gap in the club. We tried to present them with the window as a parting gift, but they refused, saying that it had been a pleasure to argue with us, and that they hoped we would have plenty of fresh air for the rest of our trip. Their places were taken by three young college girls on their way to Tomsk, and these girls were made of the stern stuff of Russians. They liked the air.

When Harry discovered that one of them was a medical student he spent the rest of his time talking over the medical situation of Turkestan with her. The "balanchok" story, by now in fluent Russian, won them to us, and they allowed us to take their photographs. They were awfully pretty to us who had seen nothing but Genghis Khans and Khanesses for so long. Unfortunately they were going to Tomsk, and we were for Omsk, which separated us after two days. We were sorry not to make Tomsk too, with Omsk under our belts.

Omsk, on the Irtish, is a large Siberian city, but even in the laughing crowds and colorful streets one misses the snows. Always there is the impression that one is on a frontier, and one feels the gloomy atmosphere of a frontier town. Omsk has many gardens, fine buildings, churches, and shops, and is the center of the butter and pork industry, according to a big butter and pork man we chanced to meet.

The churches all have the bulgy, turbanlike dome which we had noticed in Samarkand, and which one associates with Russia. Somewhere Pete had read about these domes, pointed at the top and swelling toward the base. "You know how the Russians got that dome? There was only one in the world once, on the mosque of Damascus. Tamerlane camped for a long time in sight of it when he was besieging Damascus. He destroyed it when he burnt the city. But when he got back to Samarkand he had it copied. Later the design was taken to India, and you can see it now in the Taj Mahal. Then the Russians saw it in Samarkand, brought it home with them, and spread it all over the country. That's why Russian churches look like that now."

"If that's what Tamerlane did, the Soviets put that cow in the front yard then."

A placid cow was eating grass in the churchyard. What is more, the door of the church was padlocked.

Churches may be forbidden, but there are plenty of other amusements left. We heard a symphony concert in a garden under a full moon for ten cents. The restaurants are of the best, although filled with tough, vodka-and-beer-swilling lumberjacks. We saw a movie, Buster Keaton in the "Novi (new) Sherlock Holmes" with American signs and Russian titles. We could have taken a steamboat from the center of the city to the Arctic Ocean. And we discovered a new kind of milk food.

Here as before the Friends of Gorby were treated royally. We suddenly discovered that we had a large amount of rubles left, which had to be spent in Russia, as they are worth only half their value outside. We were forced to ride first class on the Trans-Siberian, much to the amazement of our Communist friends.

This was our first big mistake. The four days to the Chinese border were the most boring of the whole summer. Luxury was not for us. Our traveling companion was an English Jew on his way to China. He was in the egg business!

The Communal Diary speaks:

"Stepping into Europe. Boring as hell. Food on car very good, but we soon get sick of not patronizing the station food stalls. No matzoni.

"Typical Siberian scenery.

"Most uneventful ride.

"Irkutsk. Beautiful scenery around Lake Baikal. This Jew gets on my nerves. Money—money, all the time. Women and money.

"Same rolling country. Up a steep pass. Trans-Siberian through express halted by a huge pig killed. Half-hour stop. Pork for dinner.

"Damn this Jew. Borrowed ten rubles."

There was nothing to the border. For a year we had heard of thorough searches made on both incoming and outgoing tourists. We expected to lose our silks, books, and diaries. We had taken three hundred photographs. We had a gun and no permit. We had photographed along the railroad and left windows open crossing bridges, both of which are strictly forbidden. But we had Gorby's letter.

The provodnik of the car had seen us with our cameras, and told on us. A broad-faced Gay-Pay-Oo who reminded us of Ivan came bustling down to us. He was very businesslike and severe. "You took photographs along the railroad?"

We could not, for the lives of us, understand him. Pete handed him the Letter with a dumb look. The fellow laughed. "Neechevo, neechevo!"

"Don't you want to see our baggage? We have a rifle." This was the test for the Letter.

He laughed again as he bustled away. "No, I want to see nothing. It's all right. You are through." He disappeared.

We looked at each other. "Free country? Everybody equal? Huh!"

But at Manchouli, Manchuria, it was different. Cook's men were there, and English customs officials. For the first time all summer we were among friends. We could speak the language, our language. These people were white, of our race. They gave us a terrible examination, and took our gun!

At any rate, we were out of Russia at last, away from the fear of Gay-Pay-Oos, thieves, and soldiers. We were free to do as we liked. We went to Harbin, heaving a mental sigh of relief.

The Jew tried to sell us some rubles at a dollar a ruble, borrowed more money, and stuck with us.

Relief! Civilization! Cheers!

We shaved. We dressed in our European clothes. We shined our hunting shoes (the only ones we had). We took a lot of money. We left the hotel in search of pleasure.

It was found. The Fantasia! The best cabaret in northern Asia!

One of them was almost as tall as Pete. She was gorgeous, slim, graceful, with a high forehead, sleek bobbed hair of lustrous black, wide blue eyes. Her hands were thin and aristocratic. She walked like a queen. She spoke German, beautiful French, and English; her English was that of the highest class of Englishwoman. She had learned it from her English governess.

The other, short, blonde, vivacious, charming. Her face was petite and childish. Her deep blue eyes twinkled as she spoke her musical, broken English. She danced like a dream of delicacy.

Both were Russian.

An American jazz band played American jazz. We drank French champagne and Scotch whisky. What is more, we almost wept with pleasure.

"We have to see the American Consul to-morrow morning about our gun," said Harry, before the conversation left the generalities. "Do you know him?"

"Certainly," said Pete's. "There he is, sitting right behind you."

By the end of the evening Harry was deeply engrossed in studying Russian, and Pete was crooning bearishly.

That was reaction!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HOME OF THE BRAVE

PETE stood by the fireplace drinking his after-dinner cup of coffee. He held the cup with his thumb on the rim and his little finger curled underneath, for with his hands he has always found it safer. His fiery red hair contrasted vividly with the dark brown of his face and the black of his dinner clothes.

Mrs. Twombley sat in an easy-chair beside him. Mrs. Twombley is white-haired, fifty-five, and the leader of Seattle society. She had given this dinner, one of those intimate affairs where everyone has always known everyone else, before the regular Saturday evening dance at the country club. But she had her own motive in asking Pete. Seattle had been buzzing with strange tales about Pete since his arrival the day before. There had been an article in the paper headed "Seattle Youth, Companion, Brave Death in Adventurous Trip Through Chinese Turkestan," with several pictures of the "Bearded Peters among Russian Ruins," and of that New York boy he had gone with.

"You must have had a *marvelous* trip," she was saying.

"Yeah," said Pete, "it was fine."

"Tell me all about it, Babe." Everyone in Seattle calls Pete Babe. He is the youngest of five. "Where did you go?"

"Oh, we just went around the world."

"You went to Turkestan, didn't you? Did you go into Tibet, and Mongolia, and India, and Afghanistan?"

"No, we didn't. We just went to Turkestan." Pete began to feel uncomfortable in his evening clothes.

"I think it's simply *thrilling*. I met a man once who went on an expedition into Syria. They dug up the most *marvelous* things, all sorts of old pottery, and ikons, and statues of gods. You ought to meet him. He would be interested in your trip."

"Yeah, I'd like to," said Pete faintly and without much enthusiasm. He took a long pull from his coffee.

"You know, I always think it's so wonderful to be a man. You can do so many things a woman can't do. I wish I were a man," said Mrs. Twombley, twisting her forefinger in the Twombley pearls.

"Yeah," murmured Pete.

"Tell me, Babe. What did you see? You must have seen a whole lot of interesting things."

"Oh, we saw a lot of natives, and several cities, and a few mountains. It was fine."

"I would give anything to have gone with you," said Mrs. Twombley, brushing off an imaginary speck of dust from her sleek, green-silk lap. "Did you get any pictures?"

"Sure, we got lots of them."

"Oh, you must show them to me. I'd love to see them."

"All right," said Pete.

"What was the name of that place you went to? Your father told me the other day, but I've forgotten. Something like Cosguard, or gurd—what was it?"

"Kashgar?" asked Pete politely but a bit gloomily.

"Yes, that was it. Kashgar. What was it like? It must have been interesting."

"We didn't get there," Pete had a far-away look in his eyes. "We got into a Chinese revolution—and—had to turn back."

"Revolution? How perfectly thrilling! Was it exciting? Was anyone shot?"

"Well, they shot a man we had a letter to, and it got us into a lot of trouble. We had a hard time getting out." Pete was warming up.

"That must have been exciting." Mrs. Twombley paused a moment. Pete said nothing. He was thinking of a name and a place which called to him with all the lure of the sensuous Orient. "Oh, wasn't that a horrible thing down in Florida, all the damage that hurricane did! Those poor—"

(*Space indicating change of scene*)

Harry leaned over the stern of the ship and watched the sun set in a coppery blaze over Puget Sound.

He had left Pete in Victoria. The Japanese *Arabia Maru* had stopped in Canada before Seattle, and Harry found that he could catch the evening train to New York by taking one of the fast Canadian Pacific boats from Victoria to Seattle, instead of going with Pete on the slow liner. He would have liked a few wild days with Pete, but he was already late for college.

Harry was not well-dressed. His light gray suit was splotched with dirt. His trousers hung baggily, as trousers unpressed for fifteen weeks have a habit of doing. His shirt was clean, but ragged where he had washed it so often. His tie was crumpled. The only neat things about him were a pair of too-small white shoes bought in Japan, and a freshly clayed pith helmet; his felt hat he had given to Samaat a long, long time ago. A young Chinese-Englishman, the third passenger of white blood in the Japanese steerage, had presented him with the helmet, for Russian caps are apt to look strange in America.

This queer figure stared at the sun going down behind the western sea, and considered the world.

Well, it was over. The trip was over. Humdrum college was the only future.

They had said it couldn't be done. "A couple o' lunatics," Johnny Berdan had sneered, months, no, several years back. "A couple o' lunatics!" Well, Pete *was* a lunatic. What had he said this afternoon? "Won't see you for a year." Not for a year. "Next summer I'll go west and you go east, and we'll meet under the clock in the Omsk station. Then we'll hit for Kashgar from the north." That was a crazy idea. Kashgar from the north? The north wasn't the way to Kashgar. Kashgar is east. You always went east as far as you could go, and you came to Kashgar.

No, next time they could meet in the beer garden at Samarkand, and go east to Kashgar.

East to Kashgar. They had been east, all the way east, until the East had become West, and they hadn't reached Kashgar.

Somehow the whole summer seemed to build toward a climax, the climax of Kashgar. Then, just before fulfillment, it turned sour, and left your mind numbed,

numbed to the vague ache in your heart. Kashgar within reach, only four days away, dangling temptingly before your eyes—suddenly snatched from your grasping fingers to disappear forever. Forever? No, you went back, you could not help going back, and you had to pursue the fleeting will-o'-the-wisp which lured you onward.

If Kashgar could be forgotten—but you could not forget. Nothing could take its place.

Without Kashgar, it hadn't been so bad. Japan—a great many people go to Japan, make it their aim, their goal, just as Kashgar—

The Japanese—what polite people they were! A strange mixture of medievalism and modern industry. To see, in a country lighted by electricity, teeming with factories and machinery, such queer customs: that widow on the train getting out at every station to show her husband's ashes in a white napkin to the crowds of mourners bowing in unison—

And Kyoto: those temples and parks had been like nothing on earth—nothing but the misty towers of Kashgar.

And women! Those four geishas in the tea-house, so delicate, so fragile, so charming, and yet so cold: Sakiko—Blossoming; Harue—Branch of Spring; Sizu—the Calm; what was the other's name? It didn't matter. Nothing mattered much but—and then those Koreans, dressed in shapeless white robes, the husbands with their tiny net top hats tied on with string: symbol of parenthood. The hills, vivid green, luxuriant with vines, rising above the temples. But the hats looked like Happy Hooligan's tomato can.

Japan was certainly a beautiful country. Pete hadn't liked it, but just the same—who could help liking the delicate scenery, the rice fields of golden yellow bordered with dark green shrubs just for looks? the dainty little matchwood houses, where you had to take your shoes off? the food served so deliciously? Japan was delicate, dainty. Some day he'd have to come back to Japan—a perfect place for a honeymoon, if the girl had any appreciation and wasn't a hard-boiled débutante.

Yes, he'd have to pick his wife carefully. It would have to be someone who could go to—

Russia—he was in love with Russia. George, Ivan, Alec, Mrs. George, Shorty—he would't mind introducing any of them to the Ritz ballroom. Wouldn't they be surprised to see a coming-out party! Ivan would sneer at first, but in the end he would like it. He was a gentleman by birth, and he was young. Frieda would look for a moment, make some remark about the rotten heart of society, and go down to Fourteenth Street to agitate. Gorby would act the perfect gentleman—he could not do otherwise, but it would have no effect upon his lofty ideals.

Russia captured the heart. This Communism business, it sounded pretty fine. Who was it said, "Socialist at twenty, the heart is right; at forty, the head is wrong?" It was a youth movement, and youth might be able to accomplish something if they did not grow old to soon.

Wonder what the family, those anchors to windward, those staid, solid, respectable citizens would think? They had been against it, they had always been against the young hopeful looking for adventure, but they had never failed to be thrilled by his tales upon his return. They were forever hoping for the time he would settle down at the fast summer resort, offering violent opposition to working on shipboard, giving quiet, peaceful trips to Europe in place of exciting adventure. This time they would praise and talk and hope that it was the last.

They could never understand about Kash—they could never think of it as failure. They would look upon it as the biggest success of all, and hope there would be no more. But there would be another. There had to be.

Perhaps it was a success. If it were a failure, there were many things to be said. The Consul at Harbin: "It was a good thing for you that you didn't get into Sinkiang. The place is in an awful state just now. Bandits, and wild soldiers, and trouble. No foreigner is safe at present." It wasn't all the fault of the Schroeder-Peters Expedition. They had done their best. But they had not succeeded. They would succeed, next time.

Samarkand—that had been worth the trip in itself. Bokhara—most people would give their right eyebrow to go to Bokhara. He would never forget Bokhara. Osh! The whole trip had been teeming with interest. It had been a lot of fun. And when you came right down to it, they *had* accomplished some things. Ellsworth Huntington had said they could get no further than the Caspian. Johnny Berdan had sneered. Those people who seemed to know had all said it was impossible to get into Russia. Huh!

They had used up very little money. They had spent less than three hundred dollars in Russia. That wasn't bad, when you considered that they had traveled over eight thousand miles in the country. Crossing the Pacific had cost only fifty dollars. Of course, Japan was expensive, had eaten up a lot of capital. And this ticket, this ticket from Seattle to New York which he had bought in Victoria, that had cost more than any other single jump of the whole summer. Well, there was a lot left. The ten pieces of gold, which had worn a hollow in his hip, were practically untouched.

It really had been a worth-while trip. There had been plenty of excitement, plenty of adventure, plenty of romance. People would be thrilling visibly to hear about it, hear about names and places of which they had only a very hazy idea. Tiflis, Baku, Bokhara, Samarkand, Osh, Tashkent. Any one of those would be worth a trip. They had seen plenty of Asia. And in the end there was nothing quite like Asia.

It was good to be home. It was good to hear English spoken. This money looked and felt funny, and yet it gave one a feeling of welcome. It was solid, not light and unreliable like the tin of the Soviets, nor covered with scrawls like the big Japanese things. You could read what it said on it. It was real money—American money! This was America! Home! The people of one's own land!

You could talk to these people, and they would understand without having to use a dictionary.

A great feat had been accomplished, but this was home again. "Be it ever so humble—" Whoever said that was right. It wasn't humble. It was the greatest country on earth. There was nothing in the world like coming back to it after the wear of strange foreign places. You were proud to belong to it in foreign countries, but you were prouder yet to come back and feel that it was yours! Home!

These people hadn't been where you'd been, but they were YOUR PEOPLE.

You felt a warm glow in having accomplished things that they hadn't, but you did not feel superior to them. You knew that they could do them too. Any American could.

Still, it had been a highly successful trip.

A young man was leaning over the rail beside Harry. He was well-dressed, nice-looking. To Harry he seemed the nicest person in the world. He fell into casual conversation.

Harry was excited to the core of his heart. Here was an American again, one of his own race. Harry could talk to him. Harry did. He didn't need much prompting to tell the whole history of his life, the complete story of the trip, everything. The man was extremely interested. Harry got out a map and showed him the route. The man was friendly, very friendly. Harry talked steadily, for it was the first time he had been really able to talk with his people.

The two of them sat down in the lounge. The young man asked lots of intelligent questions.

Another man across the aisle began to listen. Soon he was asking questions. He was friendly, and very interrested. He looked very good to Harry's hungry eyes.

"It's kind of crowded here," he said. "How about coming down to my stateroom and having a drink? You'll be in the land of the free pretty soon, and you won't be able to get it."

Harry was willing. They went down. He had a little whisky left in a bottle, which he poured out.

"Well," he said. "I know what we can do to pass the time away. I've got a pack of cards. Do you play bridge? No? Well, let's play rummy."

"You must have a lot of nerve to do all that," said the second man, dealing out the cards. The other one was silent.

"Oh, it didn't take any nerve," Harry answered, arranging his hand. "But it was a lot of fun.'

They played a while in silence.

"This is getting tiresome," said the man. "I know a game we can play. Stud poker."

Stud poker, Harry thought. It was certainly home. People played stud poker nowhere but in America.

The man started dealing. "We'll use these matches, a penny a match. Fifteen of them costs you fifteen cents. Don't worry, you can't lose much, now can you? I sure admire your nerve to take a trip like that. It must have been exciting."

The cards fell swiftly and surely. These were Americans! His people! You could even tell it by the way they dealt.

Fifteen minutes later Harry went on deck. The glow of Seattle's lights warmed the horizon.

Ten dollars left.

Behind him, on the wall, was a sign. "Passengers are Warned not to Play Cards"—play cards—"WITH STRANGERS."

THE END

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